

Playing the Past -

Historical Re-enactment Societies and the Performance of Identity in Scotland

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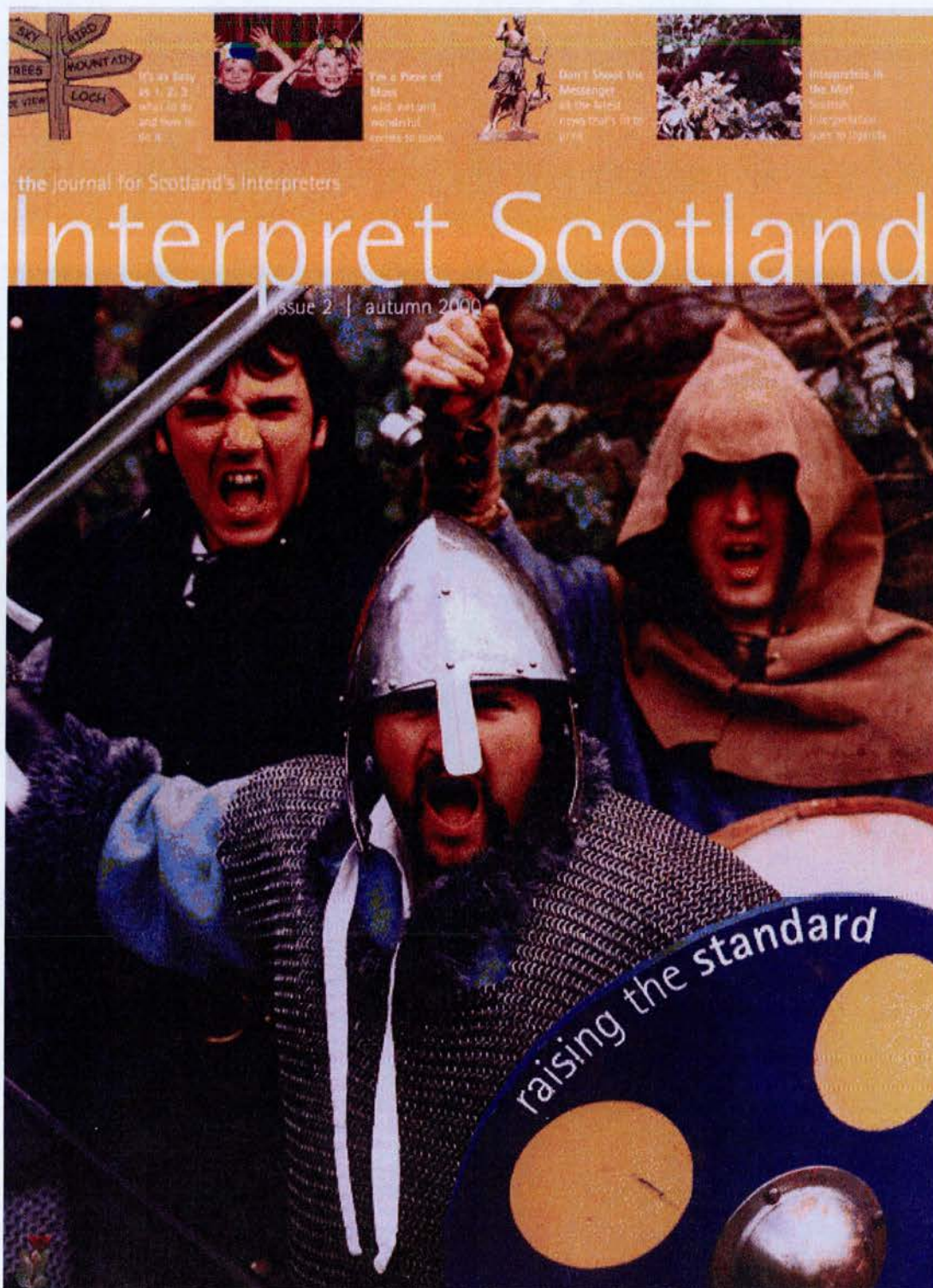


Figure 1 - the cover of Interpret Scotland magazine's first issue, featuring re-enactors

Abstract:

This thesis is a contribution to the anthropology of performance, and an attempt to further studies of identity formation through exploring the imagined, intentional communities of re-enactors in Scotland. Both nationalist and local-level politics play a part in these identities, often framed around the contested notion of 'authenticity'. The study of historical re-enactments holds implications for the examination of nostalgia and its importance in the growth of the heritage industry.

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Preface:

Through the production and consumption of clothing, tools, food, music, and bodily practices such as dance or combat, re-enactors evoke and invoke earlier historical periods. Objects created to facilitate re-enactment have a central role in this process, providing ‘proof’ of the alternative time-frame being created and allowing embodied engagement with it. I examine the full ‘performance sequence’ - the stages of preparation as these groups work to recreate both everyday lives and epic events of Scottish history, through workshops, rehearsals, and practical training, and their culmination in both private and public performances. In addition I hope to contribute to the discipline’s understanding of humour and the uses of ‘playfulness’ in building the bridges, barricades and boundaries that make up the ‘invisible kingdom’ of a recreated past. The deep mine of ‘histories’ provides a seemingly inexhaustible source for creating meaning, but the value of this resource adds to its volatility, and to struggles among re-enactors themselves over what I will term ‘the holy grail of authenticity’. The past is not appropriated for recreational purposes alone. Motivations range from the serious, often nationalist, ‘politics of the past’, to the ludic: “Let us play”; magnitudes from large-scale public ‘extravaganzas’ to intimate private performances resembling ritual practices, which create a sensory experience whose metamessage is “Let us believe”.

Prelude

Chapter One: Introduction to the Self & Field

In the increasingly elusive search for ‘authenticity’ symptomatic of postmodern life, history and ‘heritage’ play a central role in establishing identities (Handler & Saxton 1988, Lowenthal 1998, Walsh 1997). Because almost any belief or lifestyle can be ‘situated’ in the past, it both forms a vast reservoir of materials for the construction of identity, and provides a means of validation and confirmation. Jenkins notes that “the past can and will sustain countless narratives” - which is fortunate because “people in the present need antecedents to locate themselves now and legitimate their ongoing and future ways of living”(1991:18). Macdonald has also advocated exploring the ways “in which history is mobilized in contemporary identity projects” (1997b:22). ‘History’ in the present moment, for many in Western societies, has perhaps replaced the Bible as a source of certainty and legitimacy - and like that tome, and other religious texts, it is prey to interpretation, contestation, and the frequent discovery of ‘missing chapters’. History can be used to draw boundaries, to lay claim to power, land, wealth, and other resources. ‘Ownership’ of the past is hotly contested and the ability to ‘evoke’ ancestors is as important in 21st century Western societies as it has been in earlier periods and other cultures (Jenkins 1991, Lincoln 1989, Macdonald 1997c, Williams 1990). Historical re-enactors are in the thick of this battle, ‘playing’ the past in order to say something serious about the present. Lowenthal argues that J.H. Plumb’s belief that society has moved beyond a personal need for engagement with the past to a more objective, scholarly attitude has now been proved false, and is in fact “an assertion that I doubt anyone would repeat today... Far from being of less consequence, the past seems to matter more and more” (1985:365).

In historical re-enactment, also known as ‘living history’, people select a past period of time, often framed within certain significant dates, in order to emulate the clothing styles, occupations, pastimes, food, music and dance, even styles of speech, social formations and practices of the time. They engage in historical research and

reconstruction of material objects in order to 'bring the past to life'. The use of living history has become significant in museums and school programs, where recreating the past has become a popular teaching method (MacEwan 1993, *Historic Scotland* 2001:22), and in community pageants and festivals (Boissevain 1992). Since the late 1960s, groups which combine recreational and educational goals have sprung up in large number, creating what Victor Turner has termed 'subjunctive worlds':

One can work in the subjunctive mood as seriously as the indicative—making worlds that never were on land or sea but that might be, could be, may be, and bringing in all the tropes...to endow these alternative worlds with magical, festive, or sacred power, suspending disbelief and remodeling the terms of belief. (Turner 1986:26 – 27)

The focus of my research, which began in 1998, is on historical re-enactors, and their subjunctive (private and public) worlds. The re-creation of the past through what is often termed 'living history' is primarily pursued through membership in and interaction with a group, often termed a 'society'. These societies may vary in size from a small, intimate group of 10 members to those, such as the White Cockade Society (a Scottish Jacobite¹ group) or Sealed Knot Society (a Scottish Covenanting² group) who number members in the scores or even hundreds.

The range of historical periods covered is equally broad, from Iron Age Celts through Roman Britons, Vikings and Normans, up through the Second World War. Many, if not most, groups specialize in a single period, but others pride themselves on their ability to 'enact' several different historical epochs. Composition of the group, membership procedures, attitudes towards research, historical 'fact', public performance, nationalism, and gender, may all diverge widely. The only common factor linking all re-enactors, and their societies, is a commitment to an experiential understanding of history. The past is 'enacted' through an attempt at 'full immersion' - in the clothes, food, utensils, speech,

¹ A supporter of the Stewart cause of King James, and his son 'Bonnie Prince Charlie', against the House of Hanover during the 18th century.

² Scottish supporters of the Parliamentary, rather than the monarchist, cause, during the 17th century Civil Wars - so called because of their signature of the Solemn League and Covenant in protest against Charles I's imposition of an Episcopalian structure and new prayer book on the Church of Scotland.

music, dance, combat and other bodily practices identified with a certain bracketed period of completed time (Handler & Saxton 1988).



Figure 2 - learning to play nine men's morris, a medieval board game

The terms 'history' and 'the past', used interchangeably by re-enactors and their audiences alike, are problematic. Trouillot notes that "In vernacular use, history means both the facts of the matter and a narrative of those facts, both 'what happened' and 'what is said to have happened' (1995:2). Although in reality "the past and history are different things... [which] float free of each other... ages and miles apart... as English-speakers we tend to lose sight of the fact that there actually is this distinction between history - as that which has been written / recorded about the past - and the past itself, because the word history covers both things" (Jenkins 1991:5-6). Moreover, "history is not a product of the past, but a response to the requirements of the present" (Eriksen 1993:72). Re-enactors have a heightened understanding of the nature of historiography as ideological construct, and often argue for the validity of their own alternative interpretations, while failing to perceive their own productions as, inevitably, ideologically conceived; "what has gone before is always apprehended through the

sedimented layers of previous interpretations” (Jenkins 1991:11). Necessarily fragmentary, history contains only a minute selection of past events, which are then situated, interpreted, often ‘cleaned up’ (Lévi-Strauss 1966). But a mosaic made of broken fragments of Roman pottery is not the same as a Roman vase.

Despite, or possibly because of, the wide variation in constructions of ‘the past’, the number of full-time and part-time troupes enacting episodes from Scottish history has grown in recent years, from the first such society founded in Scotland almost thirty years ago. Public performances by such groups have grown in popularity, and are now sponsored by such established organizations as Historic Scotland and The National Trust for Scotland.

In investigating the uses of the past, and the appropriation of particular events and symbols in the formation of both personal and national identity, I also hope to explore to what extent these ‘staged’ performances should be labelled as ‘bogus history’ (Hewison 1987). Some have argued that by making cultural history ‘over-explicit’, historic re-enactment performances, along with historic theme parks, ‘reconstructed villages’ and heritage centres, can be seen as examples of ‘selling culture by the pound’ (Petford 1994, Walsh 1992). Public performances of famous battles, or opportunities to ‘touch and feel’ a recreated medieval market, may involve both ‘buyer’ - the domestic and foreign tourist market - and ‘seller’ - the sponsoring organizer - in a commodity transaction. However, the exchange is more complex when we include the performers themselves, the re-enactors, who become, on one level, the desired ‘object’ to be displayed and admired. Re-enactors, as frequent objects of the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry 1990, Cranshaw & Urry 1997), may be seen as ‘visual commodities’, although they themselves rarely benefit in any substantial financial manner from their performances. Rather, it is in personal and political factors that understanding of their motivations should be sought.

Re-enactors come together to form ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1991) with a created group identity based on a shared sense of history. Nationalism, in its various

forms, plays an important part in the desire of many re-enactors to reconnect with a mythic past (Lowenthal 1985). Interestingly, it is not essential in all groups to share a 'genetic' or 'territorial' claim to a particular history. In other words, one need not always claim to be re-enacting one's own personal, or ancestral, history. For many re-enactors, a deep knowledge of a particular period and place are sufficient to allow an individual to 'reclaim' it regardless of whether they have a 'historical' link with it. However, for other groups, and in particular for the audiences of re-enactments, there is a general underlying assumption that the re-enactors themselves must be 'descendants' of those whose time-space they recreate. In other words, the re-enactor might be seen to be, not describing 'history', but reliving 'his (or her) story'.



Figure 3 - woman in 16th century costume in 'Haddington Hall'

In describing historical re-enactment as a phenomenon, the predominance of battle re-enactments cannot be ignored (Walsh 1992). It has seemed to me that much of what is marketed to the tourist trade as 'Scottish' contains a masculinist rhetoric, and a focus on combat or violence in various forms. This can be seen in tourist iconography ranging

from postcards to shortbread tins (what does the famous battle of Culloden, often portrayed as the 'downfall of Highland culture', have to do with chocolate chip biscuits, one might wonder?). There is a frequent tendency, which originated in the earliest days of packaged tourism in the late 18th century, to portray a stereotypical image of Scotland as wild and primitive (Haldane 1990), populated by 'savage rurals' - generally typified by the Highlander -(Nadel-Klein 1995, 1997), for consumption by foreign as well as domestic U.K. tourist markets. These images are also projected through the choreographed fight scenes of many re-enactment displays. Given the pressures of the capitalist market, and an ailing tourism industry competing in an international marketplace, I believe that re-enactors often find themselves, willingly or otherwise, 'playing to the crowd' (Brewer 1994, Petford 1994, Haldane 1990). Moreover, despite the fact that promoters such as VisitScotland (the new name for the Scottish Tourist Board) may wish to project a modern image of contemporary Scotland rather than what can be seen as a negative or regressive stereotype, to many tourist consumers, this very stereotype is what they've 'bought into' and is in fact positively assessed. Crain argues that favourable evaluations of cultural performances may actually encourage the essentialisation of identities in an effort to feed the desire for cultural difference. She notes that in Latin America, Quimsenos performers use visual displays to make cultural and historical claims to land ownership, and create an image of the 'authentic Indian' by wearing costumes which actually originated as the dress of maidservants on the haciendas (1998:6). In similar fashion in the early 19th century, the novelist Walter Scott promoted once-denigrated symbols of Gaelic 'Highland culture' – tartan, bagpipes, etc. – and re-fashioned them as essential attributes of 'authentic Scottishness'.

However, the centrality of combat is only part of the story. As historical re-enactment societies have multiplied, enlarged their memberships, and grown in experience, many of them have moved beyond staging battles or demonstrating martial techniques, and increasingly women's impact on the metamorphosis of re-enactment societies has led many to attempt more fully rounded portrayals of domestic and social life.

Where - Behind the Tartan Curtain

For over a year and a half I became first an observer of and then a participant in historical re-enactment events throughout Scotland, from the Borders north to the Black Isle, from Tantallon Castle in East Lothian to Dunstaffnage Castle near Oban. These events included large-scale public performances sponsored by organizations such as Historic Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland; community celebrations organized by small towns to commemorate historical landmarks such as the granting of a Royal Charter; smaller-scale performances at church or school groups (generally characterized as 'charitable' or 'educational'); and private, 'behind closed door' occasions which might include crafts workshops, dance practices, feasts or 'bardic circles'.



Figure 4 - 'Highland' women prepare for the celebrations of the 700th anniversary of the granting of a royal charter to the town of Rothesay on the Isle of Bute

Participation in re-enactments involves a considerable outlay of personal resources: members invest large amounts of money, effort and time in sewing projects, leather and metalworking, weaving and other crafts. Although I had initially believed my research would be primarily structured within the anthropology of performance, I also discovered

the importance of objects - their key position in contestations of 'authenticity', their physical embodiment of the 'living reality' of history, their exchange among re-enactors and their commodification as tourist souvenirs at large public venues. Through creation and use of objects, re-enactors physically embody their chosen time, and these objects act, in McCracken's terms, as "bridges to displaced meaning" (McCracken 1986, 1988, 2000).



Figure 5 - a re-enactor's hearth with prize possessions on display

Many of the people I was working with and learning from never 'performed' publicly at all, and I came to divide re-enactors into 'public performers' whose displays often focused on battle re-enactment, and 'private practitioners' who rarely displayed their painstakingly acquired skills, apart from rare charity or community events. I eventually began to question this definition, and division, however, after I came to understand that those I had labelled 'non-performers' or 'private practitioners' were in fact engaged in very elaborate performances for their own consumption. All of these enactments

constitute displays of performance behaviour, which Schechner calls 'restored behaviour' - a performance itself based on an earlier performance, which was "either forgotten, never was, or is overlaid with other material, so much so that its historicity is irrelevant" (1982: 43).

Fiction or Reality: Drama, History, or something more?: Play-Acting

A definition of 're-enactors' should embrace the range of practitioners I met and yet clearly distinguish them both from actors, on the one hand, and amateur historians, on the other. To most actors, the *role*, whether of a named fictional or actual person, or of a character embodying certain traits, is the central focus. By acting the role, they allow the dramatic story to be told, so that the audience will become engrossed in the story and engage with it emotionally. This is achieved by the actor immersing him or herself in the role and 'bringing it to life', whether that role be Henry VIII or William Wallace or Mary, Queen of Scots. However, the audience remains aware that it is a story, with a beginning and an end, which they are observing.

For re-enactors, however, the central focus is on *time*, on the historical period or periods being recreated. History, unlike a story, has no real beginning or end, thus the re-enactor attempts to immerse him or herself in the 'when', in the *time*. The re-enactors' hope is that an audience will become captivated by the past and feel the possibility of 'entering' it themselves. This effect is often achieved by having a 'living history' encampment, peopled by the re-enactors, through which the audience can wander and observe such daily activities as cooking, spinning and weaving, game playing, and weapons practice and repair. It is hoped that the audience will leave with the impression that these activities will continue (as indeed, they often will) after they depart: that 'life goes on' in its 9th century Viking, or 13th century Scottish, or 17th century Covenanting, way, and that it is 'reality' rather than a 'story' which they have just experienced.

I also wish to distinguish between the theatrical term 'role' and that which re-enactors use: 'persona'. Most of the 'private practitioners' I encountered choose to enliven or deepen their understanding of and engagement with the period, or periods, which they

wish to recreate, by creating fictional 'biographies', which they generally term 'personas',³ through which to 'live' in that historical context. While some public-performing re-enactment groups adopt the role of particular historical figures in order to present their dramatic productions, such roles or characters are dropped at the end of the performance: the re-enactor does not 'stay in character' afterwards. Among many of the private-performance re-enactment groups, however, the use of the names of actual historical personages is explicitly prohibited: members must 'create' an entirely new person, or 'persona', from their own knowledge of the past. Such personas are based on the re-enactors' study and understanding of the occupations, status hierarchies and social relationships of the time in question.

Personas may be of a different gender to that of the individual re-enactor. However, although I met several women who had adopted male warrior personas, I did not encounter any men who chose to explore historical periods through enacting the female gender. This is perhaps less surprising than it might at first appear. As Mary Ellen Roach has argued in her studies of the social symbolism of women's dress, women adopt male dress:

as a measure of equality with men or as a symbolic demand for freedom from tradition that marks women as inferior or subordinate. It is no accident that men express no similar kind of desire to wear skirts, for psychological gain would not be anticipated. Who wants to adopt the symbols of a low status! (Roach 1979:421).

The 'biographies' of these personas are altered through time due to interactions with other re-enactors who are also recreating the period, as well as to actual circumstances in the 'mundane' life of the re-enactor. The term "mundane" is widely used among re-enactors to refer to all things that lie outwith the world of historical re-creation. It is used both as an adjective and as a noun to indicate either a) non-re-enactors, as in 'his girlfriend's a mundane', or b) 'ordinary' non-historical clothing as in 'I was wearing my mundanes'.

³ 'Persona' is the preferred term for a fictional identity complete with its own biography. Invitations to feast events often include a request to reply with information on the 'persona' in which the guest will attend.

The practice of creating fictive personas seems to derive from the pastime of 'role gaming' which became popular in the 1970s, in which players could choose to enact fictional creations such as wizards, elves, warriors, etc. One avenue through which some individuals had entered into re-enactment was an early love of such role-playing games. For some, these eventually became unsatisfactory, as participation was limited to imaginary scenarios or computer graphics or use of model figures. For others, of course, this is exactly the point. Soon after the events of September 11th 2001, at a university student societies' recruitment event, young army officer cadets shared the same room with the medieval re-enactment society and the role-gaming society. One of the young men from the gaming society told a friend in the re-enactment group that he'd been approached by the army recruiters to enlist: "What, are they nuts? That's real blood they're talking!"

Though some younger (in their late teens or early twenties) re-enactors I met continue to enjoy role-gaming as an additional pastime, other, older, re-enactors were sometimes disparaging about the lack of grounding in reality exhibited by participants in these games: "Have you ever *tried* to run up a castle's stairs carrying a Norman shield and a broad sword?!" The weight and awkwardness of these full-body shields, their impracticality off the battlefield, and the fact that most castle stairs are narrow, spiral, and curve to the right specifically to make it difficult for the average right-handed intruder to enter with drawn weapon, are all well-known to the dedicated re-enactor, who often stage their events in castles, fortified houses and ruined abbeys.

Fiction or Reality: Drama, History, or something more?

Telling His(her)story

Nurit Bird-David has spoken of the “plurality of ways in which the past is made known” through activities such as stories, songs, ritual trances involving communication with ancestral spirits, and even museum guides in period costume who speak as past characters. (Munro Lecture, February 17, 2000) She characterizes the Nayaka of South India, among whom she worked, as having a ‘multi-chronic tradition’ which belies Western academic notions that hunter-gatherer peoples lack a sense of history. Rather, she argues, the Nayaka emphasize the importance of maintaining relations with past generations through trance-induced dialogues with their ancestors, who frequently point out and complain about differences between “our time” (the past) and “your time” (the present). Although revealed as a series of disconnected events and situations, and non-narrative in format, there is a clear sense of ‘history performed’, or ‘history through dialogue’ (Bird-David 2000). This I believe is very much the way in which re-enactors often engage with their own past.

Bird-David also describes this non-narrative approach to understanding or creating history as a “familiarity with the past gained by real or imagined dialogue with past generations” (ibid), a pattern which is seen in the behaviour of re-enactors as well as museum guides, traditional storytellers, or those possessed by the spirits of dead ancestors. She furthermore characterizes this as a ‘sensual, sensory experience of the past’ which aids in creating a multi-generational bond, or in her words, a “trans-chronic ‘us’” (ibid). This sensory experience is also an important factor, I would argue, in creating a sense of community and locality. The evocation of a multi-generational, trans-chronic group also features in arguments over claims to location, which are acted out not only within re-enactment troupes and their performances but are in fact reflections of those found within the wider society.

Though re-enactors constantly evoke history, they are frequently critical of people they call ‘history buffs’, and often of academic scholars (Handler & Saxton 1988, Loveday 1994), whose scholarship may be impressive but whose grasp of the ‘reality’ of ‘living

history' is felt to be limited. I was often regaled with stories of the gaffes or supposed misunderstandings of both professional and amateur historians and archaeologists who had reached conclusions based on purely textual research, or early illustrations: "We've tried it, and it doesn't work!", I was often told.

This friction was well illustrated in a contribution to the collection *The Marketing of Heritage* in which Viv Loveday (1994) writes of the on-going antagonism between the founders of a re-enactors' magazine and a frequent contributor to the letters page who described himself as an academic. This professional historian asserted that re-enactment societies exist:

on the fringe of the mainstream of historical debate...
by their very nature they are not contributors to the process
by which we understand the past which is the purpose of
history they merely serve to fill out the details which are not in
themselves important... they must not be sidetracked by minor
matters into the vanity of supposing themselves always right
(quoted in Loveday 1994:73).

Loveday comments that, leaving the issue of vanity aside, some professionals she knows have relied on the "unsung labours of enthusiasts in collecting data for them" (ibid:74), and remarks also upon the exploitation of the work of re-enactors in establishing or popularizing heritage sites or museums.

In the first section of the thesis I will describe the methods I used to pursue my research, identify the various groups I encountered and their organisation, and give a history of the practice of re-enactment. In the central section I will spotlight types of public and private performance. The third section will examine the motivations for participation in re-enactment, from the playful to the political. The significance of both nationalist sentiment as well as humour in relation to identity and group boundaries will be described. Finally, I address issues central to the experience and perception of historical re-enactment: authenticity and nostalgia.

Method and Madness

And so begins our work, our hardest work – to bring the ethnographic moment back, to resurrect it, to communicate the distance, which too quickly starts to feel like an abyss, between what we saw and heard and our inability, finally, to do justice to it in our representations. Our fieldnotes become palimpsests, useless unless plumbed for forgotten revelatory moments, unexpressed longings, and the wounds of regret. *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996:8-9) Ruth Behar

In the ethnographic experience, the photographer is part of the camera, and both are part of the foreground being photographed as well as of the background that infuses the foreground. *Anthropological Lens: Harsh light, soft focus* (1986:91) James Peacock

I begin this description of the methods and theoretical concerns with which I approached the subject matter by attempting to delineate my own stance and the problems and issues which shaped my research. In their work on reflexive anthropology, Myerhoff & Ruby have argued that “the anthropologist, as a data-generating instrument who must also make explicit the process by which he or she gathers data, is an integral part of the final product: the ethnography” (1982:19). In order to seek ‘scientific validity’ in qualitative research it becomes necessary “to know as much as possible about the cognitive idiosyncrasies of the observer” (Kirk & Miller 1985:51). These authors have further argued that in ethnography, just as in the law court, in journalism, or in the writing of history, the ‘source’ is all-important. Thus, the life experiences, theoretical influences, lifestyle and values of the ethnographer, far from being mere aspects of personality, are better seen as relevant variables which must be reported as part of the scientific observation. Indeed, they point out that failure to do so, in a “misguided attempt at scientific modesty and ‘objectivity’”, is both arrogant and unscientific (ibid:52). As Behar has written, “ethnographies are a strange cross between author-saturated and author-evacuated texts, neither romance nor lab report, but something in between” (1996:7).



Figure 6 - the ethnographer with a falcon

Home and Away

No se decirte como fue... Over the years this anthropology became a way to always be taking leave, a way to always be returning, a way to always be packing and unpacking suitcases, as if I were mimicking the history of our own family, traveling from Europe to the other America, to this America...

The Vulnerable Observer (1996:3-4) Ruth Behar

One of the first questions that must be asked, is just what type of anthropology is it in which I have found myself engaged? 'Anthropology at home', a phrase I have

sometimes heard used, is not apt. As an American from the plains of the Midwest researching in Scotland, I am a foreigner. Though I may try to 'pass' by sporting a Scottish Football Association jacket, my outsider status is indicated by my American accent as soon as I speak.

Agar has written of what he terms 'jet fighter syndrome' among those attempting to do ethnography in their own or a related culture. Rather than plunging into a huge cultural shock once only, upon first entering the field, he describes the repeated doses of 'mini-stress' experienced by stepping into and out of the research context on one's own 'home ground' (1996:103). In my case, however, added to the homesickness and cultural fatigue which all ethnographers undergo, was the confusion of my own quasi-outsider status. Visually indistinguishable from the larger population, I remained *in cognito* until I spoke. On occasion, this caused some problems in creating a 'disjuncture'. While participating in a re-enactment dressed in 12th-century clothing, one audience member overheard me speaking to another group member. 'They didn't have Americans back in the Middle Ages!' he protested. As I am, in fact, part Cherokee, this caused me to respond, 'No white ones, at least'. I was afraid I might be taken to task by other group members for 'stepping out' of my persona, but humour is highly valued by most re-enactors, who instead laughed and appreciated that I'd 'stood up for myself'.

The term 'halfie' has been used to refer to anthropologists who are also members of the community they are studying (Agar 1996). As I eventually settled and married into the country in which I was researching, would this qualify me as a 'sort of halfie', or perhaps a 'quartery'? Agar has written at length on the blurring between once-distinct emic and etic viewpoints, and also described his own confusion upon first setting out to do 'official' ethnography in Austria, a country in which he had lived as an exchange student, worked as an academic, and in which he had close social contacts. Had he become, he wondered, a 'partial local' (1996:22)? When I find myself arguing over, say, British policies on asylum-seekers, for example, am I arguing from the point of view of a Scot, an American, a woman, a foreigner, all or none of these?

A further disjuncture is entailed. For most of the decade prior to my coming to Scotland, I lived in Japan and called the bustling streets of Osaka 'home'. Thus the 'journey and arrival' narrative which introduces most classic monographs is problematic in my own case, because of the impossibility of determining, even in my own mind, when my journey first began. However, as Ulf Hannerz (1996) highlights, 'transnational connections' are the norm, not only for anthropologists, but for 'ordinary others' these days; or to use Agar's phrase, we're all swimming in the same "global soup" (1996:21).

Finding the Field - "THOPYII"

The acronym above is derived from the phrase coined by Agar, "Those people you're interested in" (1996:22), to refer to what anthropologists have variously termed 'subjects', 'informants', 'group members', and the like. Although I have used both the terms 'group members' and 'subjects', I will generally refer to the people among whom I worked by the term they use to identify themselves, as 're-enactors'. The initial challenge of my fieldwork, however, was to locate them. No earlier ethnographies describing their whereabouts existed. They were scattered in tenement flats and houses, in cities, small towns and farms throughout Scotland. Despite this, I have used the term 'community' to refer to the interconnected groups of re-enactors, not in the sense of sharing a small-scale locality but to highlight their common interests and consciousness of distinction (Rapport 1996). Within this community, shared norms, vocabulary, symbols and attitudes function to perpetuate the groups over time. Within the practice of re-enactment, participants exhibit both a high degree of self-sufficiency and a remarkable homogeneity of attitudes and states of mind which are said to typify small-scale communities (Redfield 1960). Although primarily an 'imagined' community bound by special interest and recreation (Anderson 1983), it is by defining themselves as 're-enactors' in contrast to what they term 'mundanes' that my subjects find the fullest expression of themselves, selves which may be imagined and enhanced through the rich repository of symbolic meanings they construct and perform (Cohen 1985).

Ethical issues concerning inequalities of power between ethnographer and 'subject' were interestingly reversed. My informants were not only mobile but, as I was to discover, often highly educated and financially better off than their researcher - a fact which was to cause difficulties as I struggled to fit in and maintain the standards demanded by the dedicated re-enactor's lifestyle. I believe, however, that the legitimacy and relevance of anthropology must lie in its ability to demonstrate that its methods are as valid in studying 'up', or studying 'us' - the powerful as well as the weak, and the seemingly familiar as well as the exotic.

Occasionally colleagues have asked me if I think the people I work with are too stupid to figure things out for themselves. Of course I don't think that. Do you feel stupid when you read a book or hear a lecture or a piece of music or watch a film that snaps some connections together for you in your life? A good ethnography should have the same effect on readers from the society in which it is done. (Agar 1996:15)

Kirk and Miller have used the phrase 'copping directions', derived from urban drug culture slang, to describe the challenge of locating one's initial informants: "networking across social systems to the express end of arriving at the culture to be studied" (1985:63). In order to track down re-enactors and secure openings and introductions, I tried approaches on several fronts - spreading by word of mouth, among any and all contacts and acquaintances I'd made in Scotland, the fact that I was seeking re-enactors. I also read articles in local papers, and advertisements for re-enactment events. Two obstacles to this search for contacts presented themselves almost immediately - difficulties which in themselves came to reveal, in time, interesting aspects of the world of re-enactment.

The first problem was that contacts very quickly became defunct, as groups whose names I'd been given were found to have disbanded, split up and formed under new names, or members left to found their own new groups. This is a recurring pattern in group formation. Re-enactment groups are frequently riven by personal or ideological conflicts which render members unable to work together. Commitment to historical re-creation, however, means that few cease participating in re-enactments. They simply

form new groups, in a manner resembling the reproduction of single-celled organisms: the group turns in on itself, divides, and splits.

A further difficulty was that I was often given what turned out to be pseudonyms or nicknames for potential contacts. The sources who directed me to these people often did not know the real names of these individuals. This is due to the re-enactment practice of creating fictional 'personas' through which to experience and enact the chosen historical period. Some individuals may in fact have more than one persona, depending on the historical period being recreated. Many re-enactors eschew the use of their given or legal names, which are termed by re-enactors 'mundane' names, and are only known to friends by their 'personas'. Confusions not unlike those involved in reading a Tolstoy novel can ensue when confronted with individuals who may variously choose to be known by their 'mundane' name, or one or more of several 'persona' names, sometimes of different genders!

Only once names, either 'mundane' or fictive, locations, phone numbers or addresses were gathered, could my real fieldwork begin. Kirk and Miller have noted that the fieldworker's greatest initial challenge, of 'getting in and getting along', requires the "strategic presentation of the ethnographer's persona" in the essential task of building rapport (1985:66). Michael Agar describes this as creating the "network 'in' - having done your homework, you must find a social trail from yourself to your first informant." (1996:79)

Agar also offers a valuable caution about the difference a good or poor introduction can make to fieldwork success. Certain contacts will instantly give an 'in', while others will just as swiftly mark the researcher as 'out'; an initial choice of 'primary' informant may close off the opportunity to work with members of opposing cliques or factions (ibid:139). This was more true than I could have anticipated within the world of re-enactment, where group rivalries and the clashes of strong personalities meant that being identified with one particular organisation or another could firmly close off entry into other groups. This is probably a frequent risk in developing contacts with informants. In

her study of puppet theatre performances among young village associations in Central Mali, Mary Jo Arnoldi (1995) discovered to her chagrin that her productive initial contacts in one quarter of the village were cut off after it was learned that she had also gone to speak with a well-known woodcarver who worked for a rival clique. She was forced to 'choose' between groups, and found the woodcarver's association to be more productive in terms of gathering ethnographic data.

I had originally intended to track down members of a re-enactment group who I had once met and spent time with some years earlier, while visiting Scotland as a tourist. At that time, they were involved in making what would become two well-known films which have since become icons among Scottish nationalists: *Braveheart* and *Rob Roy*. They also planned to build, and live in, a reconstructed Highland village on land they had acquired, in order to fully recreate 18th century Scottish life. However, at the outset of my research, I found them quite difficult to locate. It turned out, in the process described earlier, that the group had changed both its name and its personnel, largely due to arguments over the direction the group would take.

I finally located them because I recognized the photograph of one of the key members in a tourist brochure and went to one of their performances. I found that they had become quite successful, but less open than I had remembered them. At their show at Stirling Castle, I was approached after the performance by one member demanding to know what I was writing in my notebook. He informed me that "our moves are copyrighted". I was surprised on several levels. Firstly, because other members of the audience were videotaping the entire show - surely a greater threat to 'copyright'? In addition it brought into question their insistence that they were demonstrating "real Highland history" - surely history itself, unlike a work of creative fiction, cannot be copyrighted? I learned in conversations later that despite their public performances the group was wary of what I might term 'an authoritative gaze'. They expressed suspicion not only of researchers but of government representatives as well.

Their emphasis on financial gain or economic 'property rights' had been a source of friction between this group and other re-enactment groups. Although I had hoped at one time to build on my earlier acquaintance to become a member of this group, I was unable to establish real rapport with them. Women were excluded from their performances - in contrast to the important role they held in all the other groups I met. This was also a source of conflict between themselves and other groups. Although there are women in the group, they remained literally in the background, and were only associated through being the wife or girlfriend of a male member.

Using networks which link the researcher into urban population groups may be more challenging than traditional village bounded ethnography. This is because of the dispersed and flowing nature of the group, who themselves move to different sites, and come into contact with a number of new people. This means that the initial stages of 'establishing rapport' and creating a local social role may be more of an ongoing and repetitive process in an urban niche or multi-sited ethnography than in a more geographically isolated community (Agar 1996).

I began my approach cautiously, which was just as well, because I found that re-enactors are often cautious themselves when fielding questions from certain quarters, particularly the media (of which I was sometimes initially suspected of being a member). Indeed, among those 'mundane' members of the larger non-re-enacting world, it was journalists, along with academics, who were most frequently targets of either suspicion or derision. Re-enactors live within the larger society, and are fully aware that their "past-time" is seen by many as bizarre or obsessive. Rather than attempting to hide their differences, however, most of the re-enactors I came to know chose to revel in them. This may be an example of what Macdonald (1997:4), citing Taylor, has spoken of as "expressive individuation", the modern 'calling' to express one's 'inner depths' and unique individuality. Furthermore, the 'inaccuracies' of journalists in the eyes of re-enactment enthusiasts, and the 'impracticalities' of sedentary library-bound historians, were flagged up to demonstrate the superior value of the knowledge of re-enactors, who in a sense, have 'been there'. Their argument is that those who pretend to have credibility, but lack

knowledge of their own history, are fools; and those who have never 'embodied' history lack the 'guts' to live as their ancestors once did.

It was essential, therefore, that I be both unobtrusive and respectful. I would 'hang around' after an event and wait for a group member to approach me. I tried to have a few comments about the performance to demonstrate my interest in what they were doing, as well as a repertoire of questions which allowed the performer to determine what and how much to answer. Typically I would begin by asking them how they thought the day's performance had gone, and what they thought of the day's audience. Hearing the re-enactors' evaluation of non-performers' appreciation of their work was one way in which I came to understand the boundaries which they perceive between their own and the 'mundane' world.

If a group member seemed willing to talk, I then pursued the conversation with a query as to how they'd become interested, or involved in, re-enacting. I often inquired as to what aspect, if any, of the particular period they were portraying, they were drawn. The responses to these questions were often intriguing, and helped me develop understanding of aspects of identity-formation, performance, and nationalism, which I will expand upon in further chapters.

At times I tackled these questions directly, but more often, I tried to lead by encouragement, showing interest in an anecdote, or repeating a comment as a request to elaborate further. Once I became better acquainted with informants, I sometimes asked them to describe, for example, a particular re-enactment event they had participated in, or conversely to describe another historical group they had seen. Still later I attempted to elicit a 'life history', outlining how a person first became involved or interested in 'living history'. An important aspect as well was to identify what subjects were avoided, or even 'dodged' - for example religious or politically controversial topics, which I will also touch upon later.



Figure 7 - captured in the photographer's gaze

Embedded Images

Finally, my interest in what are sometimes termed 'indigenous' narratives, both those produced by and about re-enactors, led to my pursuit of both verbal and visual 'texts' as exemplified in tourist brochures and promotional posters and leaflets, magazines, newspapers, books, films and television documentaries. Ball and Smith (1992) have noted that advertisements are especially promising objects of social analysis as they occur as a part of the society they describe, and lack the 'demand characteristics' of data generated by the researcher. Moreover, photographic images contained in such documents are polysemic, fusing both 'descriptive and persuasive concerns' (ibid).

Elizabeth Chaplin (1994) has argued that linguistic texts, whether written or spoken, are generally privileged within social sciences research, but that visual representations are

increasingly influential in shaping our understanding of and beliefs about the world around us. All these authors agree that created images, in common with verbal utterances, are constructed, and designed to persuade. Moreover, meaning is generated in interaction with the viewer. Beloff terms this the 'rhetorical struggle' embedded within the image (1994).

Entering the tent

Prior to fieldwork I had feared that joining a re-enactment group might prove impossible. Were such groups quite exclusive, accepting members only through personal recommendation? What talents would I need to have - perhaps the ability to read and play medieval music, or sword-fighting skills? Would I only be 'allowed into the tent' after long acquaintance? These concerns proved largely unfounded, as most groups I met were eager both to share their enthusiasm for their pastime and to swell their ranks with new members. In fact I discovered that groups were sometimes so keen to encourage new members that their zealotry resembled in some ways those of church groups eager to welcome a new 'convert'.

The main 'price' of membership for most groups was an active participation in preparation and performances of re-enactment. For some of the publicly-performing groups this takes on a seasonal cycle of promotion - liaising with sponsors and venues, such as the National Trust for Scotland and Historic Scotland, - planning - including scripting and staging, and preparation - making or commissioning armour, weapons, clothing, tents, tools, and other paraphernalia.

The actual process of 'becoming' a re-enactor varies between groups. In some, particularly the Covenanting groups with their hierarchical, military-based organisation, this was quite formal, and included an application form and an extensive list of rules. In another case, I was given a list of the "Customs of the Realm", which included both practical matters: descriptions of the structure, ritual, guilds, and ranks within the group, and humorous injunctions such as the following:

Uttering the dread phrase 'hey nonny nonny'... shall be forbidden in the Realm, except that they shall be communicated to new members as a solemn warning. *Customs of the Realm xi*

In still others, I was simply invited along to a dance, a feast, or a public performance, and provided with appropriate 'garb' if I was unable to obtain clothing of the proper period. I became a full member of two groups, one public performance troop which portrayed the late 13th century, and another largely 'private' society which primarily focused on the period of Viking settlement. In this latter group I was eventually recognized as a member of their extended fictive 'household'. As I was incorporated as a servant of the house, rather than a squire or knight, I did not undergo an official 'swearing in' ceremony. I was also a semi-official affiliated member of two 'related' groups, which had been founded by members of this latter organisation. Finally, I spent time with several other groups who variously depicted the Viking, medieval, Covenanting, and Jacobite periods, and who usually specialised in one period, but in the case of one group, doing all of these. I participated in their training and took part in army encampments and in feasts. I also socialized in pubs and interviewed them in their own homes.

During my fieldwork I practiced archery, calligraphy, spinning wool, Renaissance courtly dances, French peasant 'carole' singing, and played games such as Nine Men's Morris and the Viking 'Knaffstafle'. I have tried my hand at sewing a Viking underdress and 13th century lady's gown and headdress, an 11th century men's woollen tunic, 'braies' and hose, at tablet-weaving, cooking Anglo-Saxon and early medieval dishes, and playing the harp.

The attempt to acquire the appropriate 'garb', the term used by many re-enactors, especially those associated with the SCA, or 'kit', the term often favoured by those re-enactors specializing in public battle re-enactments, was a full-time pursuit. The term 'costume', like the term 'character', is never used by re-enactors, who prefer the expressions 'wear' (used as a noun), 'garb', 'period dress', or else 'gear' or 'kit' if referring to military dress. The acquisition of 'period' or historically correct articles such

as 'feast gear' (horn cups and spoons, bone-handled knives, pewter cups, wooden bowls, etc), on each occasion a feast or bardic circle was held, was also a challenge.

My research divided itself fairly naturally into two distinct stages: first of all, observation of re-enactments; then, as I was invited to join, came participation in the events themselves, as well as in planning and preparing for them. I observed my first re-enactment on a snowy Easter Sunday in 1998, at Stirling Castle in central Scotland. I participated in my first public re-enactment performance at the same venue in the autumn of that year. This phase lasted until autumn of the following year, and during that time I took part in events all over Scotland, from the far north to the southern border, on the east and west coasts, and ranging in scale from the small and intimate - feasts, weddings, dances, music and storytelling gatherings called 'Bardic circles' - to small-town festivals and spectacles attracting audiences of hundreds or even thousands. A map in the appendix will highlight the multi-sited nature of the research.

On Vulnerability

'Rutie, *pero dime*, what is anthropology?... The study of people? And their customs, right?' Right. People and their customs. Exactly. *Asi de facil...* Anthropology... is the most fascinating, bizarre, disturbing and necessary form of witnessing left to us at the end of the twentieth century... Our intellectual mission is deeply paradoxical: get the 'native point of view', *pero por favor* without actually 'going native'. (Behar 1996:4-5)

There was, of course, a third and final stage to the research. Prior to beginning my fieldwork, I expressed concern over the potential difficulties which might arise regarding the issue of 'entry and exit' to and from the field. I knew I would be attempting to bring together and write up my research while still living 'in the field', only a phone call or bus ride from my 'subjects'. I worried about the academic implications of failing to distance myself from my research subjects enough to obtain objectivity in analyzing my findings. I worried about the human implications of creating an 'exit' from the field - lacking the expedient of simply boarding a plane - which would be graceful, clear, and satisfying to all parties.

My fears, as it turned out, were justified, and the process of disengagement much more difficult even than anticipated, due to the nature of the recruitment process and group dynamics of the subjects with whom I was working. James Peacock has written that long after fieldwork concluded he continued to experience residual “guilt and regret that my rather relentless drive to collect and analyze data sometimes got in the way of human bonds” (1986:56). In my own case, though human bonds were formed, some were stretched and severely tested after my ‘departure’ from the field; others were painfully broken.

The Sin of Anachronism - a camera up my medieval sleeve

Before going on I must highlight one of the greatest problems I encountered, which involved the technology of data-gathering. This is what I call ‘the sin of anachronism’, and was an unanticipated and at times seemingly insurmountable obstacle in researching re-enactment ‘from the inside’. There was a complete ban on any object, instrument or material which was not in common use at the time of the period being portrayed / performed. In other words, if one wished to research, say, Roman re-enactments - one of the most popular periods south of the border, in England - one would be allowed to use writing, and could use a wax tablet and stylus to do so, although purists might argue this should only be in classical Latin! In a medieval Scottish encampment, on the other hand, a parchment scroll, quill and horn inkwell would be appropriate - but under no circumstances could I be allowed to be seen with a spiral bound notebook and ball point pen, much less a tape recorder. These strictures were enforced, not only at public events, but even more strictly at private ones.

Once fully becoming a re-enactor, cameras were hidden within full sleeves or under cloaks, tape recorders buried under piles of needlework. Notes were scribbled hastily inside darkened tents on the backs of scraps of paper. I became, to paraphrase Kirk & Miller (1985:10) an ‘adventurer, detective, journalist’, but most of all, ‘spy’. This may perhaps be overstating: in general making recordings was permissible as long as one was not *seen* to do so, an example of what Handler & Saxton (1988) term ‘token isomorphism’.

I had experienced reservations about introducing myself as an anthropologist, because I discovered that there is a common misconception in the UK about what it is that anthropologists do. I was sometimes asked whether I studied bones, or graves, or monkeys. Several people jokingly commented that “we Scots are a primitive tribe, I guess”. Rather than try to redress these conceptions - because I felt my role there was as a learner, not a teacher - I found myself instead using the simple explanation, “I’m researching historical re-enactment groups”. This seemed to satisfy most people I met.

Though I had initially approached group members and group leaders with the request to research and learn about the practice of re-enactment, when I was participating in an event, be it public or private, I ‘represented’ the group, and as part of it I was expected to adhere to standards of ‘period authenticity’. The very fact of being a ‘peasant woman’ who was able to write could in itself be seen as an anachronism, a violation of the ‘reality’ of some of the various timescapes in which I found myself situated. When taking part in an event at a public site, I often encountered members of the audience, of the sponsoring site’s staff, or of other groups, and to all of these, I was a ‘re-enactor’, not a ‘researcher’. Therefore, I found the actual recording of data on-site - writing, photographing, recording - became a furtive activity, so as not to violate the verisimilitude my informants were striving to create.

Occasionally, at teaching events such as lectures on heraldry, workshops on music, dance, or leather-working, I would ask to leave a tape recorder running in the background. But on most occasions my notes were dictated after, or between events, in trains or cars on my return home. Different researchers have offered contradictory advice on this essential activity of fieldwork, producing notes. While Kirk & Miller (1986), with their focus on ‘reliability’, emphasize meticulous running fieldnotes, labelled, dated and annotated, Agar (1996) argues instead that doing so will interrupt the practice of observation if done ‘on the spot’, though acknowledging they are likely to be ‘spotty’ and less accurate if done later that evening from memory! He advises therefore that the researcher ‘selectively narrows’ their focus, concentrate on their main concerns,

and jot down quick notes to jog the memory to follow up or check out an assumption or misunderstanding at a later point. This is essentially the practice which I followed.

This divided the two stages of research all the more strongly. Initially, as an outside observer, such accoutrements as notebooks, recorders or cameras were permissible. Once I had joined and began to participate 'as a re-enactor', however, they were almost entirely forbidden. This had the effect of dramatically impacting on the techniques, and direction, my research was to take. Because of the circumstances in which my fieldnotes were produced, my earlier theoretical interests in narrative, and linguistic tools such as discourse analysis, which require original 'sources' such as verbatim utterances or texts, became of more limited applicability. Only in a few formal interviews, or written sources such as brochures and magazine articles, would this even prove possible. However, Susan Stewart (1993:19) has questioned the privileging of the quotation, arguing that the very "marks" that lend it authority simultaneously limit the utterance by severing it from the context which gave it its original authenticity:

Once quoted, the utterance enters the arena of social conflict: it is manipulatable, examinable within its now-fixed borders; it now plays within the ambivalent shade of varying contexts. It is no longer the possession of its author; it has only the authority of use.

'Coming Clean'

Many researchers (Kirk & Miller 1986; Agar 1996) agree on the desirability of 'unlaundered' recording of observations, even if potentially shameful or socially undesirable, because they may prove to be of analytical value. They acknowledge that ethnographers are often loath to record such unpalatable data, whether generated by their subjects, or their own reflections on these people, because they fear revealing what may be seen as laughable or despicable (selfish, naive, superstitious, obscene, racist) thoughts, words or actions.

At the outset of my research, and in its initial stages, I was unsure of the utility of preserving this kind of 'data', as I feared not only offending those group members who might one day read my description of them, but also contributing ammunition to those

who see re-enactors as bizarre or even 'social misfits.'⁴ I came to understand, however, that this fear was grounded in my own attitudes as part of the 'mundane' world, because I myself found the re-enactors' world initially alien and incomprehensible. Only upon coming to know this world, and its inhabitants, did I feel able to 'represent' them without embarrassment. One consequence of this was the realization, arrived at only after repeated trawling of my notes during preparation to write up my research, that the 'embarrassing' jokes and ribald comments I had often heard and recorded during my fieldwork were actually serving an important pedagogic function, passing on group rules and norms and delineating and enforcing group boundaries and identities (Cohen 1985, 1987). This then led me to realize that an entire chapter would need to be devoted to humour, a much under-studied aspect of human interaction.

The Ethnographer's Eye

It must be mentioned that photographs hold a powerful and ambivalent status within the re-enactor's world. They simultaneously act as testimony to 'authenticity', yet are the product of technological anachronism. They witness what they disprove: another time. Re-enactors, I discovered, love photographs of re-enactments, and in part this is because they are difficult to obtain. By abstaining from the use of anachronistic materials, re-enactors are dependent on visiting, non-re-enacting families or friends, or re-enactment 'groupies', to preserve visual records of them. At the same time, such family members, friends, fans, are constantly being co-opted into the ranks of re-enactment, as I was myself. New sources of photographs are thus always being sought, and the photographs obtained shared with great interest. My own love of photography, without my knowing it, provided me with my first 'in': on revisiting groups with photos I had taken of them during earlier performances, I found myself surrounded, like the kid on the playground with a bag of candy, by eager viewers.

⁴ Recently I attended a medieval picnic at a castle near Edinburgh, at which one guest, a Ph.D. student from Cambridge who had apparently been dragged along to the event by her boyfriend, commented to me that I "must've met some real weirdos" during my research. This was said in the full hearing of our re-enacting hosts, and I couldn't help but think "but at least they have good social skills". During the early stages of fieldwork however, I was dismayed to find several fellow anthropologists express views similar to this student.

The ambivalent nature of re-enactors' relations to many aspects of modern technology were spotlighted recently when I was included in an email debate about the potential presence of a BBC Scotland radio recording crew at an upcoming re-enactment event. It is important to note here that the entire discussion took place by email; i.e. through use of computers and the internet. Re-enactors are not, with a few rare exceptions, modern-day Luddites eschewing 20th, not to say 21st, century innovations. In surprising contradiction to my initial pre-fieldwork expectations, re-enactors actively embrace invention. On various occasions, some demonstrated interests ranging from website design to cold fusion to protein crystallography! Within the context of what they term their 'mundane' lives, the use of any technologies which will allow them to communicate with each other, organize events, travel to them, and earn a living are used to their fullest. Such usage thereby facilitates their ability to re-enact.

'Living in order to re-enact' is a recurrent theme. One friend with several re-enacting acquaintances said that one "works as a lawyer to fund his re-enacting". I vividly recall an amusing story told to me by a well-known re-enactor, the head of his own highly-praised troupe who portray the medieval period of the Scottish Wars of Independence. Describing with self-deprecation a turning point in his own life, he was faced, he said, with "growing up - I had to choose between buying a suit of plate armour I really fancied, or buying a car to get into work and keep my job". (They are roughly similar in price. I was told that the cost of equipping a knight was equal to the present cost of purchasing a top model Porsche sports car). In the end, he chose to buy the car. He spoke almost with embarrassment at this example of 'selling out' to the mundane world. But in practice his continued employment has provided an income which has now allowed him to acquire not only the armour, but several swords and helmets, some of the most expensive, and sought-after, of re-enacting accoutrements.

The controversy over the request of the BBC to record a re-enactment of a medieval feast, however, highlights another two themes that I will develop at greater length in succeeding chapters. The first is the struggle for 'authenticity' and the problem of

anachronisms, whether behavioural or material, in attempting to recreate history. The second is that individual re-enactment groups themselves may have differing ideologies, aims or ethos. They may serve different functions, both for those members within and with regard to audiences outwith the group. Broadly speaking, these purposes include the primary goals of experience, education, and entertainment. Both individuals, at varying stages of their re-enactment lives, and groups, will focus on one or more of these goals to a greater or lesser extent.

To set the background to the BBC's request to record the upcoming feast, it should be explained that while the feast itself was being held under the auspices of one group, the organizer and many participants were also members of other local groups with different emphases. The group funding the feast were a university-based student society, of mostly recent re-enactors, whose primary goal I would describe as experience-seeking, and on education by participation. The senior organizer, who had been contacted by the BBC, was also a founder of another group whose purpose is largely educational. Members are expected to follow the National Curriculum when volunteering for school and church visits and the like. This group however also necessarily includes entertainment as part of the way it reaches public audiences. She had sent out an email asking society members and guests whether they had any objection to the presence of a radio crew at the feast.

I quote an excerpt from one of the replies she received in response, in this case from a member of a third group who also participated jointly in the local feasts and other such 'private' events but who generally avoid public performances as intruding on 'authenticity'. He replied:

I certainly would not want to be surrounded by microphone booms and tape decks. You'd have to put some pretty stringent restrictions on the BBC to make sure that they were not extremely intrusive. Are they offering to pay for the privilege? If so, refuse it, otherwise they will think that they 'own' the event and can do what they like, and will start directing things to make sure they can get it.

The organizer's solution was to contact the BBC and tell them that they could attend, but *only if they came as participants, rather than spectators*. In other words, they would have to become re-enactors, not reporters, if they were to be allowed in. She explained in detail that they would be lent medieval costumes, which they would be expected to wear; that they would have to eat (and pay for) the same food, and would be expected to help in the preparations of the feast hall and the clean-up afterwards. In addition, only candlelight would be used in the hall, sound equipment would have to be placed well out of the way in the corners and hidden beneath a cloth or banner. Finally, no formal interviews could take place, and singers and story-tellers were not to be asked to repeat their performances for the sake of recording.

As a researcher who had to 'become' a re-enactor in order to study their world from the inside, I read these strictures with some amused appreciation, and a feeling of *deja vu*, as I once more recalled my own adaptation to this world. Eventually, as it turned out, the staff of the BBC found themselves unable to accommodate to these demands, and to negotiate, as I did, "the paradox of professional distance and personal involvement" (Agar 1996:7).

During the year and a half in which I became a participant in re-enactment, I was required to recite by memory, sing peasant rounds, dance both court and peasant dances, and was taught to play the harp. I also learned to cook recipes from Saxon and medieval periods, and to sew clothing from Viking and medieval periods as well. Neither my weaving nor my sword skills ever came to much, I'm afraid, but my archery improved, and I became, most significantly of all, part of a recreated medieval 'household', incorporated into the structure of fictive kinship and semi-fictional biography of the group.

I observed re-enactors interacting with each other, with members of their own and other groups, with audiences, and with sponsors of their public performances. The context of these observations was the preparation (training, teaching, making), the negotiation,

analysis, and actual performances of re-enactment. I made no attempt to enter the 'mundane' lives of my subjects, and include their comments on their own encounters with non-re-enacting co-workers, teachers, family members and others, only insofar as these were mentioned in passing. I will follow the re-enactors' practice of referring to them by their primary 'persona' names, where these exist. In the case of public performers, who use personas less frequently, I will use pseudonyms for both groups and individuals.

In summary, the process of locating the people I was interested in, communicating with them, fitting in, learning, bonding, and then having to break those bonds to some extent, was similar in many regards to what all ethnographers experience, but the unique nature of the "re-enactor's world", in contrast to the "mundane" one, made the challenges both surprising and revealing.

Chapter Two: Historical Recreation – Presenting the Past

Pageantry begins with a conscious attempt to restore to the people a share in the creation and development of dramatic art; in other words, to make drama truly democratic. (Beegle & Crawford 1916:7)

The Historic Uses of History

In this chapter I examine the historical precedents for the present-day practice of re-enactment, and attempt to establish those factors which differentiate these earlier performances from those in which I participated. Forerunners of current re-enactment practices in Britain can be seen to range from as far afield as 15th century France to 20th century America. The earliest antecedents of contemporary battle re-enactments may lie as far back as the state-sponsored pageants and spectacles of the Renaissance. Art historian Roy Strong has described the ‘politics of spectacle’ of the courtly festivals which emerged during the Renaissance. After the breakdown of earlier religious certainties, he argues, these tournaments, processions, masques, firework displays, and promenades were all designed to adulate the Prince, and the State, as the “sole guarantor of peace and order” (Strong 1973:19). “In this century”, he writes, “festivals have been studied seriously mostly as a curious ancestor of theatre, but they are in reality much more a branch of political history and thought” (ibid: 247-8).

He asserts that these Renaissance displays differed in character from outwardly similar earlier medieval spectacles, which were basically ecclesiastical in nature. The creators and performers of these Renaissance fetes saw themselves engaged, not as ‘servants of God’, but in “virtuous employment in the service of the State” as well as endeavouring “to revive the lost festival forms of classical antiquity” (ibid: 21). This led to a ‘humanistic preoccupation’ with the reconstruction or revival of ancient forms of music and performance:

By means of myth and allegory, sign and symbol, gesture and movement, festival found a means to exalt the glory of the wearer of the Crown. In such a way the truths of sacred monarchy could be propagated to the court and a tamed nobility take its place in the round of ritual (Strong 1973:21).

I would argue that these same symbols and techniques have been adapted today for quite different purposes, for example, in order to exalt the 'ordinary people', the *ethnos*, those of a shared common history. The key difference between these earlier medieval and Renaissance spectacles, and the large-scale public performances I have observed, lies in their sponsorship, and thus in the political goals they strive to promote. Ecclesiastical and princely uses of history attempted to legitimize and naturalize the *status quo*. As Herzfeld has demonstrated, the state achieves the illusion of permanency and stability through their claims to 'eternal verities': "Nationalists appeal to tradition because its alleged antiquity validates their claims by rooting them in a seemingly unassailable bedrock of historical fact" (Herzfeld 1997: 39).

Modern-day re-enactors, however, may appropriate these forms and methods for projects of their own. Although not on the grandiose scale of state or church-sponsored spectacles, these 'grassroots' re-enactments do require large inputs of labour, finance and 'knowledge capital'. I would argue that increases in literacy and the standard of living in Britain and throughout the West during the second half of the 20th century have made these surpluses available to a large number of people from quite ordinary middle-income (though often of working-class origin) backgrounds, and thus 'democratized' access to history and performance as a means of self-fulfilment or even for political purposes of their own.

Types of Spectacle

During their Renaissance heyday there were three main forms of princely festival: the 'royal entry', the 'exercise of arms', and the indoor 'divertissement' (Strong 1973). The last of these developed into what we now recognize as the opera and ballet, while the first type seems closely related to the pageants or historical processions which flourished in the late 19th century and were in particular vogue amongst the adherents of the Arts and Crafts movement, as will be described below. In most cases, however, present-day large-scale historical re-enactment is a close reflection, although not a lineal descendent, of the second of the three types of 'festival': the combat of arms.

Lords of the lance

Prime Health brought a remarkable spectacle to Didsbury, Manchester, recently to help raise some vital charity cash, writes *Debbie Chapman*. Indeed, you could easily have been forgiven for thinking you had stepped back in time to the days of Robin Hood had you witnessed the activities at Hough End Centre on Sunday 27 June.



Spectators were treated to a display of chivalry, bravado, and skill – altogether more 1299 than 1999. It was all thanks to Legends Equine Display which staged a medieval jousting tournament, sponsored by Prime Health, as part of a family fun day organised by the Rainbow Family Trust to raise money for Francis House Children's Hospice.

Francis House is committed to caring for children with a

short life expectancy. It offers skilled nursing care for these children in a homely, happy, and secure environment giving essential relief and support to the whole family.

Based in Manchester, Francis House relies entirely on voluntary contributions. Prime Health's Stockport office has elected Francis House to be its local charity, and it is among the charities to benefit from the LIVE175 Appeal.

Prime Health Managing Director Mike Hall said: "We were delighted to be able to continue our support of Francis House in such a spectacular fashion."

Other activities during the family fun day included a sheepdog skills display, car boot sale, and an *It's a Knockout*-style competition. Brave Prime Health staff from Stockport entered the *It's a Knockout* challenge and got a thorough soaking as they participated in various activities. But it was a sterling effort and, all in all, a great day that raised much-needed funds for a very worthy cause.

LIVE175



Mag gets new look

After three years in harness as Senior Publications Adviser, Jan Smith took her leave of the Company at the end of August, heralding more than a few changes at *The Standard*. Jan had been very busy on other projects recently, such as *The Line*, and freelance writer Keith Davidson and the external design and editorial agency Carter Rae have filled the breach.

In the light of Jan's departure, Internal Communications Manager bobel Marley asked Keith to step into the editor's role, in liaison with Sue Hodges of Internal Communications, while a new agency has been appointed to look after design – Design Links of Edinburgh.

In the coming months, Keith and Design Links, with the support of Internal Communications, will be looking to develop *The Standard*, to build on Jan's award-winning work since 1996. Watch this space.

Security week

The week commencing Monday 25 October will see security top of the agenda across the Company.

Security Manager Frank Connolly said: "We'll be informing people about a range of issues during that week, and there will be displays in some of the Head Office buildings."

"Building managers will be making a special effort on matters such as wearing identity badges and the clear desk policy, while we'll also be looking at information technology security and things like staff safety."

■ For more information on the initiative, call Frank on 52154.

Figure 8 - the eternal appeal of knights and horses: Standard Life, a major Edinburgh financial institution, uses jousting re-enactors as part of a charity event (illustration from company magazine)

Strong notes that the Italian *condottieri*⁵ were the first to convert the traditional royal procession into a town or city into a re-created antique Roman imperial triumph, with the prince as victorious hero (1973:25). These might include bound ‘captives’, elephants laden with ‘spoils’, and costumed figures representing the king’s ‘ancestors’. In addition to these staged one-off events, monarchs also attempted to promote a general return to what were seen as desirable earlier values:

Parallel with these developments in the conventions of the royal entry, rulers promoted what might be described as a deliberate revival of chivalry. Although the feudal realities of medieval chivalrous society had gone, the patterns of its behavior and mythology lived on, were indeed, one could say, revitalized in the court life evolved by Tudor, Valois and Habsburg. Chivalric attitudes and values were overlaid by a fashionable Neo-Platonic gloss, traceable, for instance, in handbooks of courtly behavior. (ibid:37)

It is difficult to ascertain just how successful these attempts were, but certainly chivalric romances such as Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* enjoyed great popularity. Equally popular, it seems, were stagings of tournaments based on earlier medieval jousts. These again were of three basic types:

the tilt, in which knights broke lances against each other across a barrier; the tourney, in which rival parties of knights fought in a *melee*; and the barriers, in which knights exchanged blows on foot across a barrier, a feat of arms often performed indoors rather than *alfresco*. Although the tournament was still regarded as military training even at the close of the fifteenth century, it had already developed as an artistic form of expression in its own right. (Strong 1973:38)

Of these forms of combat, few re-enactment groups now perform the tilt, simply because of the expense of owning and training horses. In the U.K., only one group I met, The Knights of Royal England, perform the tilt, and they are invited up on an annual basis by Historic Scotland to put on this spectacle at various sites. Another group, based in the Borders, also performs on horseback, but demonstrate archery and striking at spinning practice dummies rather than against other mounted horsemen.

⁵ Interestingly, this term has been appropriated as the name of an umbrella organisation which brings together a number of re-enactment groups in Scotland and England to discuss standards, safety procedures, and share insurance costs.



Figure 9 - jousting tournament at Tantallon Castle, East Lothian

The *melee*, on the other hand, is still popular among re-enactors, although rarely performed publicly because of its inherently unpredictable nature. A large group of re-enactors in Scotland meet annually for an event called ‘Warbands’, in which rival groups attempt to occupy or take over fortified sites, and engage in the free-for-all style *melee*.

The form of combat called ‘the barriers’ is probably most similar to what is performed today in historical re-enactments, although without the presence of the barrier: knights on foot exchange sword blows, or a knight fights against a foot soldier armed with pike.

When combat displays are staged at public sites, they are carefully (although, it has to be said, not always successfully) scripted. This too, is very much in keeping with the practice of the Renaissance spectacles. Rene of Anjou wrote a treatise on tournament ceremonial, in which “the element of actual combat was made subservient to a carefully rehearsed dramatic plot” (Strong 1973:38). Strong terms these “prestige spectacles, in which the myths of medieval romance were deliberately harnessed to the Crown” (ibid:44). In modern spectacles the myth is more often joined to the populist notion of a glorious national history.

At one time monarchs themselves competed in these carefully staged events. But as noted above, it is difficult, if not impossible, to plan fully even feigned combat. The death of Henry II in 1559 at a tournament intended to celebrate his recent marriage led to a curtailing of actual fighting and a greater emphasis on display. Louis XIV, that superlative showman, still chose to appear as a 'knight' on horseback, although in purely non-combative role, as late as 1662.

Fascinating as a historical document in its own right is Beegle and Crawford's early 20th-century description of pageants, which notes the revival of medieval tournaments, including jousts, made popular in the French *carrousels* of the 1600s, in which sumptuously costumed nobles and cavalry officers participated, mounted on horseback. King Louis XIII took part in a *carrousel* in 1612 to celebrate his wedding. In both France and Italy, mounted processional pageants, or *cavalcades*, took place (Beegle & Crawford 1916:29-30).

Strong argues that the "ritual of chivalry" became especially important in late sixteenth-century England, because of the rivalry of Catholic, Puritan and Anglican factions. The 'revival of chivalry' managed to cut across these barriers, unifying the country under the cult of the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I. Each year on the anniversary of her succession, a tournament was held in which nobles in historical dress rode at the tilt. These events continued through the reign of James VI of Scotland and I of England, whose eldest son, in his role as the Prince of Wales, was feted in such a tournament in 1610.

By the close of the sixteenth century, however, such dangerous pursuits were being eclipsed by magnificently staged indoor masques and fetes. It may have been assumed that the public, the populace at large, had already 'gotten the message' of the divinity of kings (or perhaps the Stuart and Hapsburg monarchs mistakenly believed it had). In any case, courtly spectacles at this time were presented to an inner, and elite, audience. One interesting record reveals that in the court of Charles I a masque portrayed him as the restorer of ancient British glory - "the bringer to perfection of historical process"

(Strong 1973:237). Performers costumed as Picts, Scots and Irish danced, signifying a return to the unification of these kingdoms under the Stuart crown. Alongside the dancers, a chorus of 'Druid priests' extolled the virtues of the royal family. The Stuarts' claim to a divine kingship was therefore predicated on the notion of a *resumption* and reestablishment of purity, to a unified island nation as it had existed, albeit mythically, in the time of the king's ancestors.

From the Renaissance to the Pre-Raphaelites

The old certainties of 'divine kingship' were themselves soon to be swept away, however, and historical pageants and processions on a large scale do not seem to reappear until the late 19th century under the auspices of the Pre-Raphaelites⁶ and social reformers of the Arts and Crafts movements, whose adherents included some of the leading lights of American, English and Scottish society. As early as the end of the eighteenth century, a romantic revival of interest in the literature, arts, architecture, and chivalric ideals of the Middle Ages had swept through the British upper classes (Girouard 1981: 20).

Some researchers therefore trace the large-scale revival of pageantry to the Eglinton Tournament, a 'medieval' joust sponsored by Archibald William, 13th Earl of Eglinton in 1839. Ironically, although many sources claim that this event took place in England, I have uncovered evidence that it actually took place in Scotland, at Eglinton Castle in Ayrshire. A preliminary practice had been held in Regent's Park in London in order to generate interest in the tournament. In fact, so great was the response that guests, including Prince Louis Napoleon, travelled from Europe and America to attend the feast, ball and tournament at Eglinton Castle, near Irvine, on the 28th of August.

⁶ During the Victorian era, and continuing into the Edwardian, an artistic movement developed which came to be termed 'Pre-Raphaelite' after the group of painters who advocated a return to the aesthetics of the period prior to the life of the late 15th century painter Raphael. It enjoyed great popularity throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Unfortunately, heavy rain on the day meant the joust had to be curtailed and the feast postponed, but participants' enthusiasm was unmarred, and the festivities went ahead two days later, on Friday the 30th of August. The only known contemporary painting of the event is part of the collection of the South Ayrshire Council, who also hold the silver trophy which was awarded at the conclusion of the jousting.

The motivation behind this elite⁷ occasion was largely political. Due to the Prime Minister's desire to restrain expenditure, Queen Victoria's coronation had been a scaled-down event in comparison with those of earlier monarchs, and was disparagingly referred to as the "Penny Coronation". Lord Eglinton, a Tory, had taken offence to this, as his family would have been closely involved in the preparations for the royal event. As a result, he decided to hold a 'knightly tournament', an opportunity to indulge in the spectacle and pageantry lacking in the new Queen's coronation, and perhaps to salve his family's pride. Wealthy friends of the young earl were invited to participate, each providing a full suit of armour, a horse, weapons and trappings at a personal cost of almost £200,000 pounds in present-day currency. The historical characters, or knightly 'personae', assumed for the Tournament vanished afterwards, as the prohibitive cost meant this was a once-only event (Girouard 1981; McEwan 1993). In fact, despite the popular, and perhaps political, success of the events, Lord Eglinton was left in serious debt afterwards, and was forced to sell off parts of the Ayrshire estate in order to finance them.

I would argue that Lord Eglinton and his political associates could be seen to be enacting their own 'family history', or at least claiming to do so, and thus the Eglinton Tournament bears more in common with earlier Renaissance spectacles in their attempt to establish aristocratic prerogatives. In contrast, later 19th-century pageants were concerned with enacting a national or community past, and those of the late 20th and

⁷ "Only members of the upper classes were allowed to attend the joust rehearsal and participate in the accompanying ball, although the general public was allowed to attend the final event" (McEwan 1993: 10).

early 21st centuries add to this an emphasis on personal, individual history and egalitarianism.

Cumming (1985) has revealed the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement on the artists, architects and craftspeople of Edinburgh at the end of the 19th century. When the second congress of the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry was held in Edinburgh in 1889, it drew luminaries of the arts including William Morris and Walter Crane, along with famous local speakers such as Patrick Geddes, to the Royal Scottish Academy, the neoclassical 'temple' at the base of the Mound on Princes Street. Earlier, in 1884, Geddes had founded the Edinburgh Social Union, with the dual goal of promoting improved craftsmanship and design in decorative arts, and of bringing those arts, and an improved quality of life, to the ordinary people of the city. Classes were held in Corstorphine, on the Lawnmarket and on the Mound in crafts as varied as metal work, book binding, leather work, and wood carving. Working men and women were encouraged to take courses in singing, gymnastics, gardening and science. The avowed purpose of the supporters of the Social Union was to develop the minds, bodies and spirits of the 'ordinary man and woman'. In pursuit of this goal, public buildings in disadvantaged sections of town were decorated by members of the Social Union. Phoebe Traquair painted the murals for the Royal Edinburgh Hospital for Sick Children and the Royal Infirmary with reproductions of paintings by Burne-Jones, Kate Greenaway and Walter Crane.

Cumming argues that nationalism and nostalgia were closely linked in these projects. Geddes, in sponsoring such events as the Applied Arts congress to be held in Edinburgh, and inviting prominent guest speakers from abroad, demonstrated not only his intention to bring Scotland to the international stage, but also a "fierce yet sentimental nationalism, Celtic rather than Scots" (1985: 6).

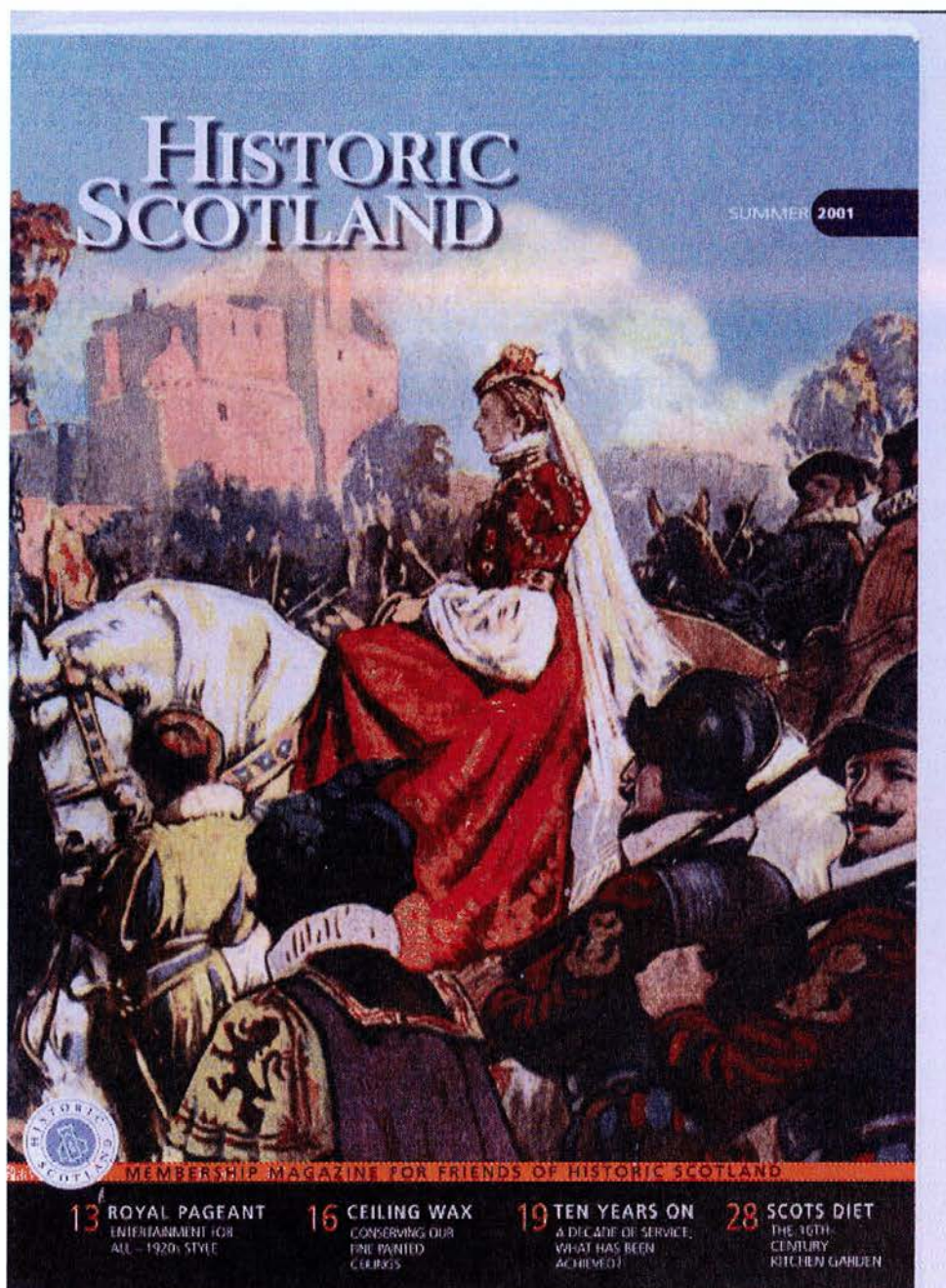


Figure 10- Historic Scotland magazine cover featuring early 20th-century re-enactment of Mary Queen of Scots

The Edinburgh Social Union was a school for more than just the study of art or crafts. A distinctive nationalism, in this case more practical than romantic, developed among its students. Thus nationalism not only inspired a greater appreciation and interest in the

country's past and its art, but a study of Scotland's history and a National Art Survey undertaken by members of the School led to an increasing national pride as well.

According to Cumming, this culminated in the historical pageants staged by art workers in Scotland during the early 1900s. These in turn were partially modelled on earlier masques and tableau vivants which were presented by the Glasgow Arts Club and the Royal Scottish Academy, or the one presented at the Museum of Science and Art in Chambers Street (the present-day Royal Museum of Scotland) in 1899 by the Art Worker's Guild, *A Masque of Winter and of Spring*.

For Coronation Day in 1902 the Glasgow City Council asked the artist W. G. Burn Murdoch to orchestrate a festive procession based on his frieze of characters from Scottish history. Although several years in the planning, in 1908 his elaborate plan finally came to fruition in a '*Scottish National Pageant of Allegory, Myth and History*'. As Cumming writes:

Here were represented groups from history and legend - from the time of Malcolm III to the Jacobites, from Arthurian Legend to Celtic groups. Altogether some six hundred participated, including architects, craftsmen, artists and their families. This was considered the most ambitious of all pageants, and succeeded the masques organised by Patrick Geddes in Edinburgh in 1894 and Francis Newbery in Glasgow in 1905 [a '*Masque of the City Arms*']... Among the players in Glasgow were J. Craig Annan [as King Arthur] and Charles Rennie Mackintosh [a splendid Queen Morgan le Fay] (ibid:11).

Interestingly, one of the last of these spectacular pageants was held in honour of the University of Edinburgh, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of the University's McEwan Hall. The great architect and social reformer Patrick Geddes was once more behind the event, and his *Masque of Learning* was staged at McEwan Hall and ran to eight performances. University staff and lecturers and their families, artists and teachers from the Art College, all played roles in the pageant, both in planning and staging the production. In all there were said to be more than nine hundred performers - actors, singers and musicians. Held in March of 1912, this was one of the last such events held before the outbreak of war.

Pageants and Patriotism

These spectacles faded away after the First World War. Only a few more such events were staged in the 1920s. I believe this was not only a result of a lack of resources, or of a national mood for celebrations and spectacle, but also of a loathing of nationalism and its excesses in Europe, especially apparent after the Second World War. A return to an earlier nostalgic nationalism in Britain only became apparent in the later years of the 20th century, sometimes, but not always, devoid of the excesses of sentiment or romance typical of performances of a century earlier.

There was, however, a conscious attempt to promote such pageants on the other side of the Atlantic, in the United States, in the early years of the 20th century. As an early work of this period shows, such events also harboured a social and political agenda:

The modern revival of pageantry was undertaken as a conscious and deliberate attempt to create a community art.... [its] object was to stimulate civic pride and patriotism by making vivid through dramatic representation certain events of the history of a particular community... All were to unite in celebrating not the fame of an individual but the past history of their own community.
(Beegle & Crawford, 1916:17)

Beegle and Crawford date the post-Renaissance revival of pageantry to an event staged at Sherbourne, England in 1905 by Louis Parker. They note that such historical pageantry had enjoyed a considerable vogue in England, but had become so elaborate and expensive that “the whole fabric of the idea threatened to collapse under its own weight... (ibid:13), and worse, to become monotonous, which was due, they claim, to the established ‘episodic’ style of these pageants. They advocated instead community-based and devised pageants of an ‘amateur and cooperative nature’ allowing smaller-scale, more varied productions, which could fulfil the purpose of celebrating local or national history, festivals and holidays (ibid:13). Although depicting local events, however, such portrayals of history could also be understood to have national significance.

Beegle and Crawford identified two types of pageants, which they refer to as the ‘English’ model, which closely followed the chronological order of a series of historic

events, and the 'American' model, which used allegory to weave a unifying thread between the historic episodes in order to create a more comprehensive narrative. These latter take on, therefore, more of a didactic or moral character (ibid:19). In the 'English' model, in contrast, the audience were "left to absorb for themselves the lessons of beauty and patriotism" (ibid:20). Moreover, they argued that English history, being so much longer than America's, allows for a greater spectacle and variety of subject and costume, thereby providing much of the interest of these pageants.

Interestingly they note that the larger proportion of immigrants in the United States necessitates the addition of an interpretive element to American historical pageants, which were unnecessary in the (then) relatively homogeneous British society. Finally, the importance of the "conquest of nature" in American history was more easily portrayed in allegorical rather than realist fashion, as it is difficult to dramatize the isolated struggles of a pioneer homesteader cutting back forests or building log cabins through the medium of a pageant. Regardless of the various causes, the authors believed that this 'new' form of pageant allowed for greater drama and variation. They also advocated the use of 'American Indian myths' and folk-lore as a varied source of material available to stagings of American historical pageants. Examples of some of these allegorical additions are included in the description of a 1914 pageant in Massachusetts, *The Pageant of the Mohawk*. Symbolic scenes ranged from depictions of the power of the forces of nature to the 'spirit of industry', and included one early ecologically-focussed interlude entitled 'The Protest of the Pines', which represented "the forest's complaint against man's encroachment" (ibid:22). Furthermore, 'visions of the future', especially as the finale to a pageant, were also typical of American historical spectacles.

The authors describe in some detail a pageant they themselves helped to stage in New Jersey in 1914. Opening with a representation of 'The Red Man's Vision of the Land', it progressed through scenes showing the "dance of spirits of the inland waters", and the "spirits of field and forest". Interestingly, the dramatists admit that their purpose was to

“show the Indian dwelling among these nature spirits but unable to control them or to make them serve him save in elementary ways” (!) (ibid:23).

Institutional pageants, showing the history of schools, universities, the army or navy, or the church, are also mentioned as distinct variations of smaller communities enacting and celebrating their own histories, but which usually focus on abstract ideas and thus rely almost entirely on allegory, such as ‘The Progress of Science’ or ‘The Triumph of Reason’ (ibid: 25-6).

The authors advocated the study of past pageants in order to inspire or give meaning to present-day celebrations. In particular they lament that significant American holidays such as Independence Day and Labor Day lack structure or meaning in their celebrations, consisting of “noise, fireworks... and parades [with] no meaning” (ibid:31-2). Interestingly, they noted the first steps towards the establishment of Christmas as a ‘community celebration’ (circa 1915) taking place in New York and St. Paul, Minnesota, including municipal Christmas trees, choirs, and plays (ibid:33). By the end of the same century, pressure from non-Christian groups protesting the spending of public money on such events brought an end to these municipal events. In 1916, a pre-melting pot or multi-cultural time, however, the writers were able to argue the promotion not only of Christmas, but of May Day as a significant festival for “English-speaking peoples” (ibid).

They argued further that a new form of pageant drama should be advanced - communally written and produced, on local themes, for performance by amateurs. Its emphasis should be on “pictorial values”, with a simplicity in both plot and ‘emotional content’ to take account of open-air staging and inexperienced actors. Colour and romance should be used to bring to life a local hero, whether real or legendary - unlike the historical pageant *per se*, in which “the community is the hero”. Continuity of plot can be laid aside in favour of ‘picturesque incidents’ (1916: 37-8).

On a moral note, Beegle and Crawford wrote that “pageantry is a rational and joyous form of recreation, a sane outlet for the unconquerable play-spirit which, when lacking outlets, may become a source of danger instead of benefit” (ibid:16). The didactic and ethical elements of the American-style pageants were quite overt in comparison to their British counterparts. Beegle & Crawford believed that in order to achieve social transformation, it was important to attract as broad a spectrum of interests as possible, but not to repel them through excessive zeal for a cause. They cited Horace in arguing that the purpose of drama is both to give instruction and pleasure, tolerance towards others, and a greater understanding of life: “The great value of art to a democracy is that it produces as by-products education and social betterment.” (ibid:8)

Puritans and Plimouth Colony: Restored Villages, Restored Behaviour

Perhaps as a consequence of the increasingly multi-cultural society of the United States, these homogeneous and unifying ‘community’ pageants also faded in popularity by the second half of the 20th century. However, this period saw the rise in number of pseudo “Renaissance” pleasure fairs, ‘heritage’ theme parks, and ‘restored villages’ constructed on historic sites. Re-enactment as it is practiced today, generally small-scale, primarily for recreational but also for educational purposes and neither state nor town-sponsored, is a fairly recent activity.

Petford’s (1994) study of the marketing of tradition and the heritage industry traces it back to the introduction of costumed guides at Colonial Williamsburg in the United States in 1932. Greenfield Village, another ‘living history museum’, was also founded in the 1930s. These were the earliest of what Schechner terms ‘restored villages’ (1982). Fifteen years later, in 1947, ‘Plimoth Plantation’, a constructed village designed to illustrate the lives of the first European settlers, was opened in New England. Costumed guides there initially gave third-person explanations of the site. Gradually, however, during the 1970s, the guides began to speak in the first person present tense to visitors, as in ‘we do this’, rather than ‘they did that’. This style became adopted as official policy in 1978.

Since then, other sites, including some in Britain, have used this practice as a model for their 'interactive' heritage sites, in an attempt to compete for an increasingly sophisticated and demanding tourist dollar or pound (Petford 1994). While restored villages and heritage centres were marketing their sites by using re-enactors, others took it up purely for pleasure - or some might say, pain. In the United States, Civil War enthusiasts formed amateur groups such as the North-South Skirmish Association, which was founded in 1958. These groups have a reputation for extremely demanding standards of authenticity in re-creating battle conditions, including marching through mud without boots and sleeping in the open rolled up in no more than a blanket. Despite these self-imposed rigors, Civil War re-enactment groups grew in popularity, perhaps due to the exposure garnered during the 1961-65 American Civil War Centennial (MacEwan 1993).

Schechner writes that by 1978 there were more than sixty 'restored villages', along the lines of Plimouth Plantation or Colonial Williamsburg, in both the United States and Canada:

Typically they restore the colonial period of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; they reinforce the ideology of rugged individualism as represented by the early settlers of the Eastern States (Colonial Williamsburg, Plimoth Plantation); the shoot-'em-up West (Buckskin Joe, Cripple Creek, Cowtown, Old Tucson); or romanticized heroic industries like mining and whaling. Some, like Amish Farms and Homes, are a spectacle of people actually living their lives; a few, like Harper's Ferry, commemorate historical confrontations. (Schechner 1982:56)

Identical processes take place in Scotland and elsewhere, such as the 'restored' village of Paramatta outside Sydney, Australia, which recreates an early penal colony, in which visitors take the role of new 'convicts', or the plethora of mining, whaling, fishing, weaving and other museums in Scotland.

Schechner's own theoretical interests lie, not in the actual reconstructed buildings, but in the performance of what he terms 'restored behaviors', behaviours which were lost to daily practice, but archived, researched, revived and 'restored' to life. One of the most

obvious of these, of course, is the restoration of language, or archaic patterns of speech. Schechner quotes at length from Moran's account of 'Plimoth Plantation', a 'restored village' based on the Massachusetts colony settled by Puritans in the early 17th century:

In each building a member of the household that would have resided there (in 1627) greets you and asks 'How be ye?' Within a few minutes you find yourself responding in a language that was foreign only moments ago. 'I be well, thank ye'. One little girl is asked, 'Where be ye from?' 'New Jersey', she answers. 'I'm afraid I don't know that place.' A parent intervenes. 'You see, Susie, New Jersey isn't invented yet.' (Moran 1978, cited in Schechner 1982)

Schechner notes the strange juxtaposition of 'typical' v. 'actual' in re-created villages such as Plimoth. None of the buildings are original, but have been researched and recreated along the lines of typical styles of the period. In contrast, the actual biographies of the settlers who once lived at the original Plymouth colony are known in some detail, and the performers are each given an individual 'biography' - much like the self-created fictional 'persona' of the re-enactors I have worked among. These so-called 'personation biographs' (Schechner 1982:58) include not only aspects of life history, but also such things as personality, dialect and wardrobe. This results, Schechner claims, in a situation in which "the characters have a kind of authenticity the architecture lacks" (ibid).

This authenticity, as always in re-enactment, is limited. Schechner points out that the village is only open to the public, only inhabited, from April through November. The bitter winter weather that brought starvation and death to some early settlers is not part of the recreated 'authentic' experience. Despite the attempt to segregate anachronistic elements of the complex, such as restaurants, gift shops and toilets, which are all outside the reconstructed village itself, this is still a theatre event, relying both on voluntary suspension of disbelief and on what Schechner has characterized as 'restored behavior'. It is a theatrical spectacle whose season ends, ironically, at that very holiday with which Americans commemorate these early pilgrims and the hardships they suffered - Thanksgiving, in late November.

Another interesting aspect of these 'restored' villages is their reliance on audience participation which, Schechner notes, has largely died out in mainstream theatre. However, in theme parks and restored villages, it is very much part of the visitor experience. Examples include mock shoot-outs at fantasy or film-based Wild West villages, where costumed performers and tourist spectators alike 'duck for cover' when 'gunslingers' stage battles in the street.

Schechner argues that the key difference between such restored villages and the attempt to 'revive' faded or vanished traditional ritual forms, such as the Vedic *agnicayana* ceremonies which Brahmin priests in India pieced together from texts and the memories of old villagers, is that the former *know* that "it's all make-believe" (ibid:59). There is a temporary temporal paradox, one which Schechner characterizes as the 'subjunctive mood of restored behavior'. The participant is simultaneously in two alternate states / personas / time periods. This is also typical I believe of the inner experiences of both re-enactor and audience member at publicly-staged events in the U.K., and the extent to which all participants share the same experience contributes to the success, or disjuncture, of the performance.

Private Practice

Like the restored villages and living history museums, most 'recreational' re-enactment groups in the United States portray periods of American history. In focusing on their 'own' history they have much in common with British re-enactment groups, although, of course, they have a shorter period of recorded history with which to 'play'. Many large-scale modern groups started off on a small scale. For example, the National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association (NMLRA) was founded in the early 1930s by hobbyists interested in old-fashioned black powder rifles. This eventually led to an involvement in the material culture of nineteenth-century American fur trappers and pioneers, and in the re-creation of early American frontier life. These members became known as "buckskinners", and gathered in authentic "primitive" camps to hold shooting matches and other activities (MacEwan 1993).

By the 1950s, other members of the NMLRA had branched out on their own to recreate the American Civil War, wearing the 'gear' and using the weapons of that period. As a result the North-South Skirmish Association was incorporated in 1958. Similarly, the 1976 Bicentennial of the American War of Independence also boosted participation in American Revolutionary War re-enacting groups, especially in the northeastern United States. Other groups began to re-enact other wars and time periods: the French and Indian War, the War of 1812, and World War II, for example (MacEwan 1993). While many of these groups concentrate on large-scale battle re-enactments, and the weapons and uniforms of the soldiers of the time, the American Mountain Men (AMM) re-creates the culture of American woodsmen from 1800-1840, and like the re-enactors among whom I worked, they take on original 'personae' and develop them into an ongoing biography, and attempt to 'live' their period as accurately as possible. Although these are 'private' performances, they are all the more intensely focused on authenticity because of the 'in-group', knowledgeable audience they serve.

The Society for Creative Anachronism

American re-enactment groups have had a strong influence on some of the practice of historical re-creation in the U.K., particularly through the presence in this country of a group which was originally formed in the late 1960s in California. The SCA, or Society for Creative Anachronism, was co-founded by a Berkeley computer programmer along with a medievalist university student who went on to write fantasy novels. This may account for the blend of fantasy and fact still found in SCA events today, not only in America but also among the many branches now found in Britain (MacEwan 1993). Marion Zimmer Bradley, an early participant and another sci-fi fantasy author, known for her feminist take on the Arthurian legends, coined the name "Society for Creative Anachronism" for the new group in order to request permission for a tournament to be held in a local park (ibid).

In 1968, two years after the first open-air event, the group achieved the status of a non-profit 'educational organisation' and initiated a formal structure and system of office-bearers. Regions are organised into 'principalities', 'baronies', and 'shires' depending

on size and membership. I participated in events held in the 'Shire of Harpelstane', roughly centred on Edinburgh. Despite this overarching structure, SCA branches in the U.S. and U.K. vary quite widely in terms of their internal interests, administration and outlook, but generally rely strongly on volunteerism and are therefore egalitarian in structure, featuring a system of rotating 'kingship' based on success in combat (MacEwan 1993:15). In addition to 'kings' and 'consorts', who rule 'kingdoms' for a six-month reign, some smaller local groups may be headed by a 'seneschal', while individual events may be organised by an 'autocrat'.

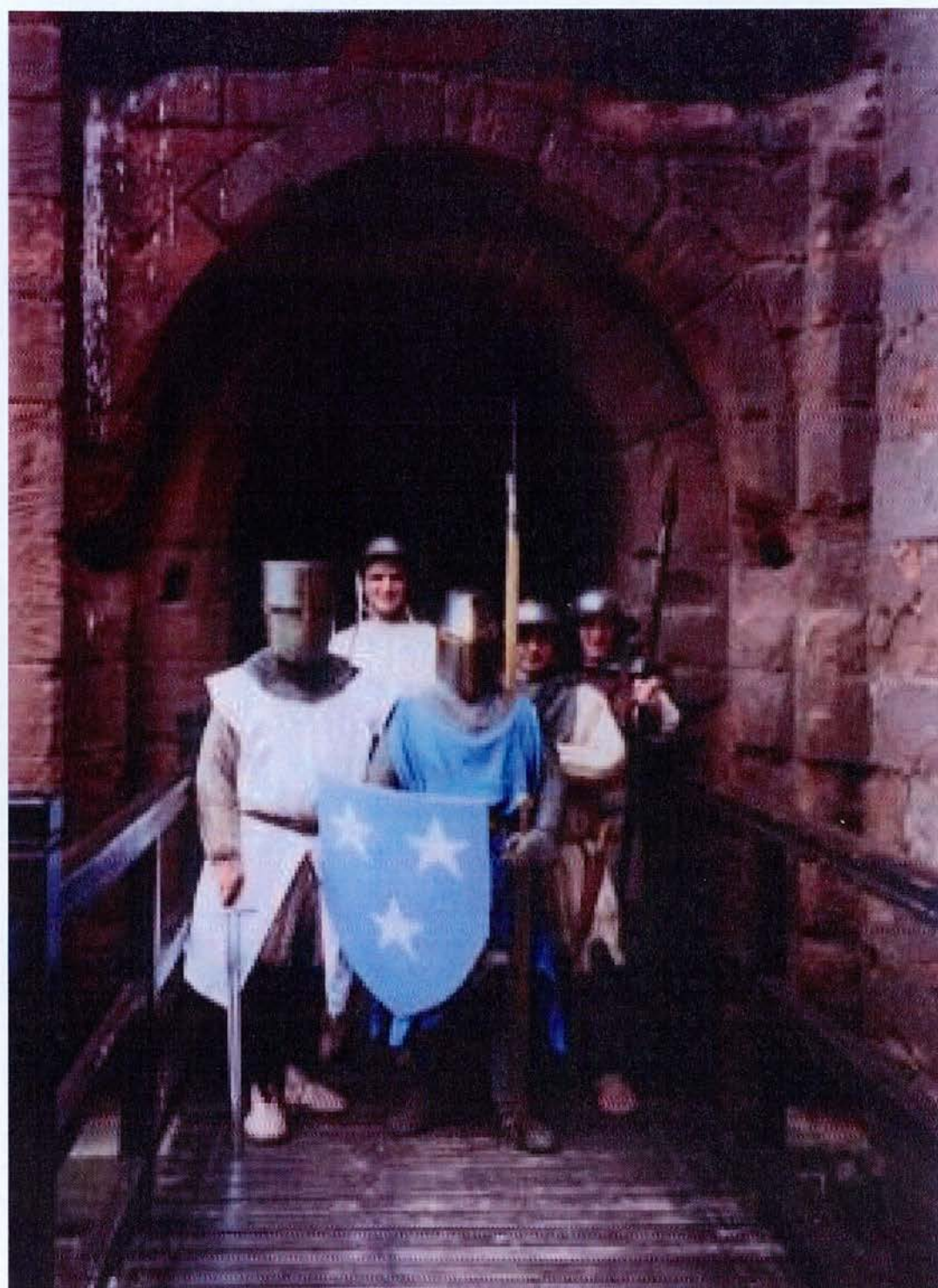
In these last features the SCA strongly resembles native British re-enactment groups, in which, as with ancient Celtic chieftains, leadership rests in equal measure on prestige and accomplishment, and on the consent of the individual members.

However, where SCA generally differs most from the majority of British re-enactment groups is in its attitude towards 'authenticity'. One notable difference between SCA and many British-based groups for example is that there is a greater emphasis on practicality and comfort than on appearance - thus, camping events in the U.S. are held only in warm weather, in contemporary tents with modern equipment (not like the cold nights I spent in Scotland, in wet canvas tents on bare ground). MacEwan argues that this is because SCA are 'oriented towards their urban members' (1993:12). Moreover, SCA argue that they are creating a 'Current Middle Ages', made up of elements selected from a time span of over 1200 years of European history, rather than recreating a particular historic period.

So central is the concept of authenticity to the practice of re-enactment that a chapter will be devoted to sorting out the various levels on which it operates and is debated. Suffice to mention at this point that two distinct varieties of authenticity may function in historical re-enactment (Handler & Saxton 1988). The first variety is described as 'token isomorphism', which in this case takes the form of fidelity to appearance. Adherence to 'period' - i.e., a practice, attitude or object which can be legitimately identified as having existed in the historic time frame being enacted - is an ethic shared

by all re-enactors. Individuals, and groups, are judged however on their ability and willingness to conform, or conversely by the extent to which they reject or stretch these boundaries. The second variety of authenticity, much harder to identify or quantify, is experiential, and stems from the embodied experience of the individual practitioner as well as his or her audience. I will try to address this level of experience throughout this text.

All these elements have contributed to the present performance of 'living history' re-enactments in Scotland, whether through emulation or reaction against them. It is not a monolithic practice, however, and the individual groups serve different functions - social, cultural, and political - both for their members and their audiences. The variety of groups I encountered, described according to their structural organisation, practices, and chosen historical period, will follow in the next chapter.



Chapter Three: Setting the stage: Dramatis Personae

Populating - and Popularizing - the past

Many people are unaware that during the final years of the 20th century, and the early years of the 21st, a large-scale invasion took place throughout Britain. Re-enactors have flooded into British homes. The public acquiesced in this 'small-screen' infiltration, however: by turning on their televisions. The lure of history, both as popular entertainment and as source of mythic truth, is more evident than ever at present. The cover of a recent *BBC RadioTimes* guide⁸ featured the well-known historian Simon Schama. He was flanked by two actors in 17th century costume portraying Charles I and Cromwell. In the issue, Schama had a 4-page feature spread on the latest episode of his series *The History of Britain*. This included photographs of pitched battles staged by Roundhead re-enactors, a contemporary etching of the battle of Marston Moor, Van Dyck's portrait of Charles I, and a photo of the shirt worn by the Stuart king at his execution in 1649. In all, the efforts of artists, actors, historians and museum curators contributed to the article and the programme it advertised. The most dramatic image of all, however, was the two-page photographic spread of a volley of musket fire by a large group of Civil War re-enactors.

Re-enactment groups are commonly used as extras in historical programmes of this sort, for many reasons. Probably chief among these is that they come equipped with their own meticulously researched clothing and weapons. In addition, they possess the knowledge of how to use them, and of military practices of the time. Examples might include the formation of a shiltron⁹ of pikemen, as well as the two-tiered ranks¹⁰ used by musketeers.

⁸ Television and radio listings for the week of May 5th 2001; see pgs. 32-35

⁹ A hedgehog-like formation of packed spears, used to protect archers from mounted opponents, or to push through enemy lines.

¹⁰ Because of the time it took to load early muzzle-loading guns, one rank of musketeers would kneel to reload while another stood and fired, and then switched places, thus keeping up a steady volley of fire.

In the same issue, another feature promoted one of the latest in the newly popular 'people experiments' or orchestrated social documentaries a la '*Castaway*' or '*Big Brother*'. In these programmes, groups of people are forced together, either in the confines of an island or a house, and observed to study their interactions. Interestingly, the group of volunteers in this incarnation had been asked to join in '*Surviving the Iron Age*', living in a reconstructed village of roundhouses in Wales for seven weeks.

This was in fact a much shorter version of an earlier BBC series of the late 1970s, '*Living in the Past*', in which a group voluntarily decided to live as Iron Age villagers for a full year. They constructed their own homes with materials and techniques of the period. They also raised Iron Age breeds of sheep, cattle and pigs, slaughtering them for food, and grew barley and rye to grind for flour. To some extent participants even attempted to recreate the ritual seasonal ceremonies which they believed were practiced at the time for blessing the livestock.

Even in the course of this much longer and arguably more 'authentic experiment', however, conflicts between 20th century values and those of 2 millennia earlier were apparent. One or two of the participants in the 70s were vegetarians - not, perhaps, a common lifestyle choice in the Iron Age. They objected to killing and eating the livestock. Another woman was eventually asked to leave the group as it was felt that she was placing unreasonable demands upon the village's resources. She insisted on giving her two children, who accompanied her, daily baths. This necessitated drawing and carrying large quantities of water as well as using a supply of firewood to heat it. The other village members argued that her insistence on 20th century hygiene standards was not in the spirit of the experiment, and wasted wood and water better used in cooking and heating their wattle-and-daub houses through the winter. The mother, feeling her children's health and well-being was at threat, chose to leave the village before the year was over.

One of the participants in the recent show was in fact the daughter of a couple who had been members of the previous 'Iron Age village' 23 years earlier. After visiting the new

site, these former participants complained that the village had been entirely built for, rather than by, the new volunteers. Moreover, all their food was provided for them. The father of the girl who participated in the new re-enactment claimed that the current “Iron Age” group had been much less healthy, and more frequently sick, than his group had been in their entire year of being isolated and forced to provide their own sustenance. He attributed this to “modern bugs” brought in by BBC staff delivering supplies, and factory-farmed meat (Ellis 2001:17).

Another complaint of the volunteers was that the BBC had decided that the village would be ‘ruled by a chief’. “I don’t think anyone was entirely comfortable with that. No one was prepared to be a dictator and tell everyone what to do. We wanted a democracy” said one young woman (ibid:17). The fact that ancient notions of political representation probably differed substantially from 20th century Western notions of ‘democracy’ was not addressed by any of the participants.

These two examples demonstrate again a common theme I encountered in my own participation in ‘living history’, as well as in debates among regular (i.e., not ‘put together’ for the sake of television entertainment) re-enactment groups. This was the conflict between ‘authenticity’ and modern standards of comfort, hygiene, social interaction, and safety. It is just such conflicts, however, which seem to make ‘good television’ - or at least, popular and lucrative television.

Schechner has spoken about what he terms the “theatricalization of anthropology”, in which

a shift occurs whereby we understand social life as narrative, crisis and crisis resolution, drama, person-to-person interaction, display behavior, and so on (1982:51).

I believe that it is not just anthropologists, but increasingly the public at large, who view social life in this way. This can be seen in the popularity of the programmes described above, and of exposés, docudramas, and artificially constructed social groups or realities such as *The 1900s House*, which recreated Edwardian family life, or *The 1940s House*,

which did the same for a British war-time family. Even the life of a Roman soldier in 3rd century Britain has been recreated. Sleeping bags had to be issued, however, when the modern-day volunteers, unaccustomed to sleeping in tents in the rain, began to suffer from hypothermia. Most recently, BBC 2 has screened *The Trench*, in which twenty-four men were given eleven day's 'army training'. This was to prepare them for two weeks in 10-foot deep mud trenches in the north of France. Here they tried to recreate the life of First World War soldiers, complete with woollen uniforms and open latrines. Participants slept on wooden boards, wearing boots and full uniforms, and had no fires or running water. Explosive charges threw up mud and stones, creating the chaotic noise, if not the casualties, of trench warfare. One participant described it this way: "Sleep deprivation, bitter cold, shocking food - 100 different ways to eat horse".¹¹

Schechner also argues that archival technologies allow the preservation and restoration of the past in unprecedented ways:

Already the past fifty years are available on film. Waves of styles return regularly because of this availability. We are not going to 'lose' behavior from the 1920s, for instance, in the same way or to the same extent as we lost previous epochs. We live in a time when traditions can die in life, be preserved archivally as behaviors, and later be restored (1982:56).

I would argue that the ability, and desire, to restore the past is even greater now than when Schechner first noticed this trend. There have been amazing advances in 'experimental' and reconstructive archaeology, in genetics and forensics, and in computer generated 3-dimensional 'virtual realities'. These allow viewers of programmes such as *Time Team*, *Secrets of the Dead*, *Time Watch* or *Son of God*, which traced the life of the historical Christ, to 'walk' through the temple of Jerusalem as it was when Jesus walked there, or 'witness' the construction of Vespasian's Coliseum in Rome. We can even gaze on the faces of the long-dead through reconstructed clay faces modelled upon unearthed skulls.

¹¹ Quoted in 'Back to the Western Front', *Radio Times* March 9 - 15 2002, pg. 43.

‘Living mannequins’ - Re-enactors & the Restoration of the Past

This hunger on the part of the public to ‘experience’ history has led to a demand for the expertise of those who specialize in ‘living history’ - re-enactors. Not only are their appearances in film and television on the increase, but they are a regular part of the promotion of everything from banks and shopping malls to the historic sites in the care of government agencies such as Historic Scotland, or the National Trusts.

The distinction between public and private performances is, I believe, an important one. However, it is necessary to note that preferences among different groups for public versus private performances are not always exclusive; while some groups only meet privately, and others only engage in public events, many groups do both, staging public spectacles in part to finance private celebrations and improvements to equipment or clothing, and also to gain access to spaces and settings, such as castles or historic homes, that would otherwise be unavailable to them.

I met a large number and variety of groups from all over Scotland (and one or two from England as well) during my fieldwork. They represented several historical periods, and had various approaches and philosophies towards recreating history, but had many more commonalities than differences. In all, I spoke with members of at least 12 different groups. Two groups I saw on a regular basis, at various events, or in ‘backstage’ practice situations, and I became an active member of two further groups, one based in the west and one in the east of Scotland. I should mention that many of these groups are interlinked, rather than distinct: one person may sometimes be a member of more than one group, as I was, while several groups are formed by off-shoots of larger ones, and (depending often on whether the ‘split’ was acrimonious) members may continue to participate in activities with their original group while becoming involved with the new one. Off-shoot groups may form in order to concentrate on a different historical period (“I wanted to do Border Reivers”, said one medievalist) or because of different focuses - the desire to concentrate on heavy combat, or crafts, or on getting ‘performance contracts’ - or simply due to personality differences, often between rival group ‘leaders’.



Figure 11 - Historic Scotland magazine often features re-enactors on its cover, such as this woman spinning

When I initially began to meet re-enactors, I found the divide between public and private performances confusing. Large-scale public performances, most often centering around the re-enactment of historic battles but also featuring demonstrations of crafts, clothing, games and falconry, are performed for a variety of motivations. These include feelings of nationalism and patriotic pride, a desire to educate audiences about the past, an interest in warfare or martial arts, financial profit, the opportunity to recruit new members, the chance to make use of significant sites and buildings, and simply the love of performing in front of an audience.

However, the motivation for private events, which ranged from feasts to weddings, workshops, music and dance practices, and ‘bardic circles’ (shared storytelling and singing events) were less obvious. They lacked external audiences, and many of the aspects which motivate the public performances. I initially classified such groups as ‘aficionados’ rather than ‘performers’ in the traditional theatrical sense. The purest of purists, many ‘aficionados’ never appeared outside of private homes in ‘garb’ (the usual re-enactment term for ‘costume’, a word which is rarely used), while many of the most popular ‘public’ performers, in contrast, never seem to wear historic clothing except when in front of non-re-enacting audiences. These public events by their nature created their own ‘backstage’, in Goffman’s (1959) sense.

It became clear, however, that the private events were not offstage or non-performance events, but rather highly refined dramatic rituals. Moreover, they were ‘performed’ in front of the most discerning, and demanding, audience of all: among fellow re-enactors, fellow ‘believers’, who may be extremely unforgiving of a failed performance. These are embodied experiences, and the attempt to create an ‘authentic’ alternative time will usually involve not only sight and sound but taste, smell and touch, as electric lights are banned, candles smoke, and the smell of wax, leather and wet wool and the feel of horn spoons and pewter goblets surround the ‘performers / interactors’. This almost total

immersion in the chosen era seems to result from quite different motivations¹² from those which inspire public performances and to fulfil different social and emotional functions. Both types of practice will be addressed in separate chapters.

I will argue that the public and private re-enactments are essentially different frames, those of play v. ritual. In Arnoldi's work on the Bamana Tonko festival and youth association puppet theatre of Mali, she argues that:

[w]hile the primary metamessage of rituals is 'let us believe' (Handleman 1977:187), the metamessage of *Sogo bo*, 'let us play', opens up the dialogue about the past and the present, exposing it to scrutiny and commentary. It masks any one group's competing claims about authenticity, power, and knowledge. (Arnoldi 1995:187).

'Fictive' Kinship, Created Kinship

The importance of the 'household' in certain re-enactment groups was made evident to me in conversation, in created artefacts, and even in advertisements aimed at the large re-enactment market. An issue of the magazine 'Call to Arms', which claims to be the 'International Historical Re-enactment Directory', bore on its back cover the following full-page advertisement, posing the question,

Just won your spurs? Looking drab and battleorn?
Simply just changed household? We can supply your
period heraldic clothing.

One man explained to me that he was changing his heraldic device because he had become involved with a woman who was a member of another household, loyal to a different king. "It's a perfectly valid period reason for changing alliances", he insisted. Households do more than just create a market for heraldic livery, however. They are systems within which, through fostering, training, fictive kin ties, and actual marriages and reproduction, the re-enactor's 'world' is sustained and reproduced.

During the course of my fieldwork, I myself became a member of such an extended household. When I received an invitation an Anglo-Saxon feast, I was required not only

¹² As one Berkley activist said, "we're protesting against the 20th century" (Thewlis 1992:26 quoted in MacEwan 1993)

to RSVP but to supply a period 'persona' name and social rank. In addition I was also requested to give a period occupation, and alliance to a household. It was at this point that I asked permission to ally myself to the household of a man I had come to know as 'Gunnar'. I had become a friend to his two young daughters, and was often trusted to look after them during combat practice sessions, when their mother often assumed her male persona in order to fight and to train her squire. Therefore, I listed myself as a servant in their household. There follows a brief description of this household, its alliances, and how they came about.

'Gunnar', in his Viking or 'Hiberno-Norse' persona, first established a group of men around himself when he moved to the Lothian area. These men, whom he trained in sword fighting, Dane axe and other aspects of armed combat, formed a mercenary band around him when they travelled to fight other groups in England and elsewhere. As was the Anglo-Saxon and Norse practice, these men were called 'companions'. Later, Gunnar said, he "encountered a Viking maiden named Ragnhild", who was a member of a kingdom extending over the southwest of Scotland. Among those re-enacting Viking or Hiberno-Norse personas, Scotland was officially divided along the line of the A74, which is an old Roman road. Such ancient roads, or natural landscape features, are often chosen as dividing lines between 'kingdoms'.

Gunnar then "courted" her, he said, "of course doing everything in the Viking way, not by asking her directly - well, not officially, in any case - , but by asking the man to whom she owed her loyalty and duty", in this case being her fictive uncle. Through his marriage to Ragnhild, Gunnar also formed alliances with members of her 'household' and became, as a married male, a head of household of his own. Gunnar and Ragnhild had a full formal Viking wedding ceremony, with the appropriate clothing, jewellery, rituals, witnesses and exchange of gifts.



Figure 12 - a Viking couple in wedding finery

I would characterize the categories of membership in his 'household' as of three main types: biological kinship, fictive kinship, fosterage. In the first category are Gunnar and his wife and their two children, who were given the Viking style surname, 'Gunnarsdottir'. Additionally, Gunnar's sister married his former squire. Gunnar joked that he was forced to knight his squire, who had not yet merited this honour by skill in combat, because "he could not have his sister courted by a mere squire!" I often heard the use of somewhat anachronistic terms such as 'courting' and 'chivalry' used in conjunction with activities such as dating behaviour among re-enactors.

In the second category, Ragnhild's persona had fictive kinship relationships within her own 'kingdom'. Her 'uncle' was leader of that 'realm' and agreed to give her away in marriage. Her 'cousin' Fracog was 'uncle's sister's daughter'. These 'fictive' relatives took the parts in the marriage ceremony of actual blood relations. Among re-enactors, kin are "those whom one remembers and for whom one cares" (McCallum 1990).

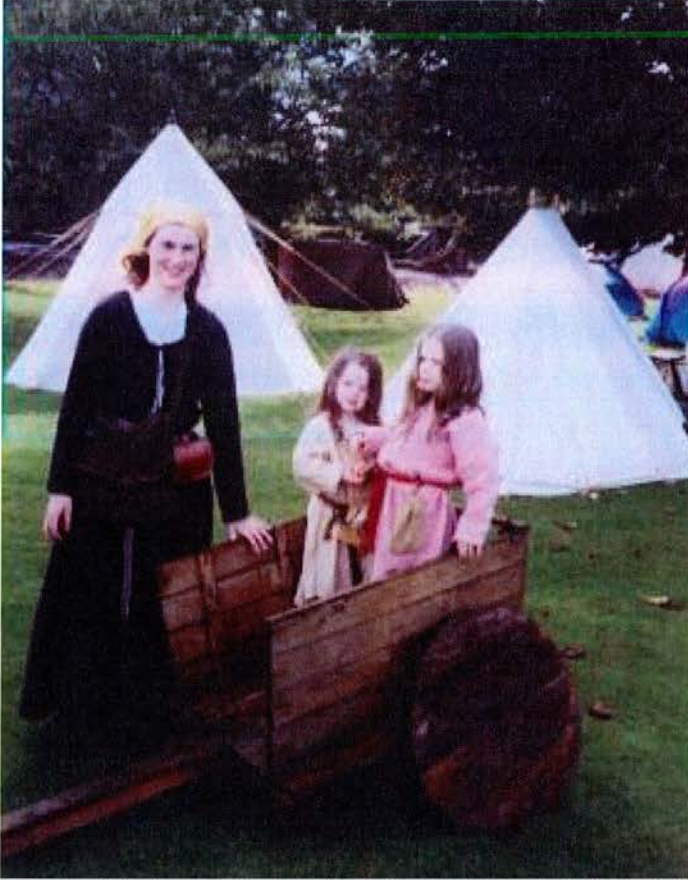


Figure 13 - Ragnhild and the Gunnarsdottirs

Finally, the household had an extensive network of ‘fostered’ members, most of them squires in training. A squire, Gunnar explained, is released from fealty at knighting, but may choose to remain as a retainer of the household or strike out on their own. There were at this time four squires attached to the household, two male and two female but using male personas. All members taken on to be trained in combat are titled ‘squires’ regardless of gender. Ragnhild also had a male persona, as Arne Grimsson; ‘Arne’ being a name which could suffice either for the Saxon or Viking period. Additionally, there was one foster daughter whose role largely centered around caring for the two Gunnarsdottirs. She was not interested in pursuing combat as a squire, and so the medieval practice of fostering a son or daughter was used to enable her to enter into a formalized relationship with the household. As Cohen (1987:68) has demonstrated,

kinship “does not determine social relations; rather, it is a product of them as a matter of acknowledgement rather than of obligation”.

Goody (1971) has characterised fosterage as an ‘institutionalised delegation’ of the role of parenthood, comprising both nurturing and education. In re-enactment societies, fostering focuses primarily on the latter element, and serves not only to reproduce and pass on values but also is an intentional imitation of earlier social practices deriving from the time period the groups are recreating. Ellis notes that:

In all Celtic societies, children underwent an education which was termed ‘fosterage’, by which they were sent for a period to foster parents who undertook their instruction in various fields. There were two types of fosterage in ancient Ireland: fosterage for affection... for which no fee was paid... and fosterage... where the child acquired its full education... Each child had to be educated according to their rank (1995:115).

Macqueen’s (1998:280) history of the great families of the west of Scotland also notes that the “custom of fosterage, disapproved of in the canon law but widespread in the Celtic areas of Britain for many centuries, was used in Carrick, most famously in the case of Robert the Bruce, later king of Scots”.

In addition Gunnar’s household boasted a ‘house priest’ and ‘house fool’, whose chief quality lay in his good-natured tolerance and ability to entertain the lively Gunnarsdottirs. Additionally, the knight married to Gunnar’s sister, once Gunnar’s own squire, had acquired a squire of his own.

Thus, ‘persona’ have biographies of their own, which grow over time and often reflect real events in the re-enactors’ lives, such as marriage, childbirth, or moving to a new region.

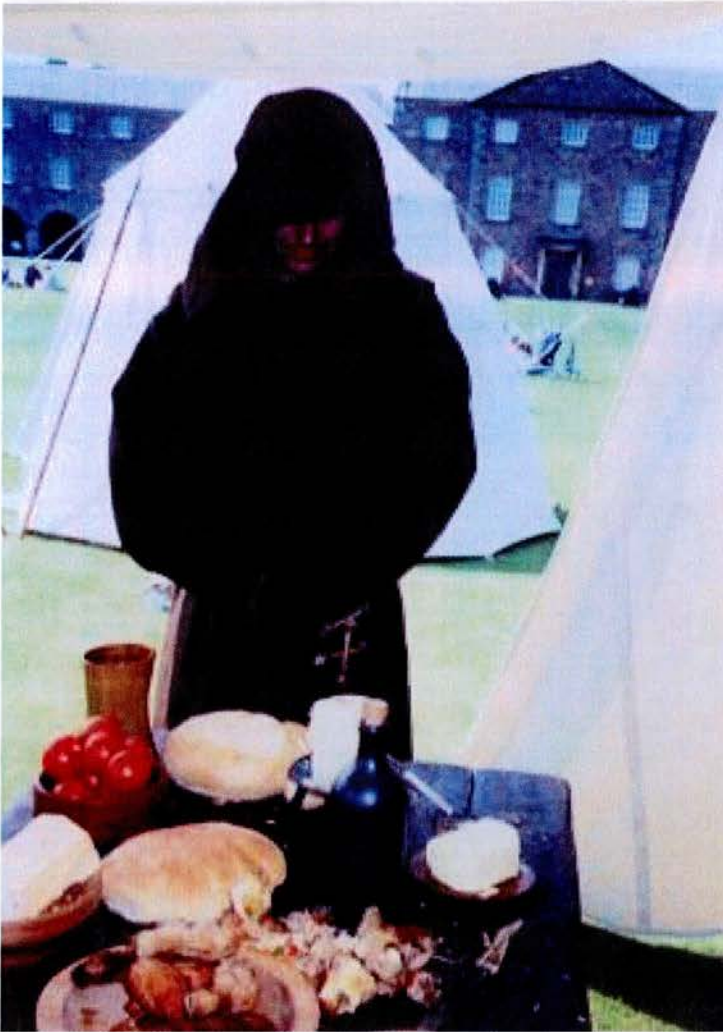


Figure 14 - a 'priest' blesses the meal

Although 'public-performance' focused groups do not utilize these elaborate forms of extended household, kinship still plays a key role. Often, two or even three generations are involved in re-enactment. In many cases, such as for those men who joined the Scottish Covenanter's group Sealed Knot in the late 60s or 70s, it is simply that they have married, brought their wives into the 'regiment', and now their teenage or young adult children have become involved. In another case, three generations were all keen medieval re-enactors: a woman had brought in first her husband, then their children, then her own parents and brother as child-minders!



Figure 15 - children are an important part of the re-enactment camp

One of the things which soon became apparent to me was the fact that many of the re-enactors I met were married. Couples, often with their children, made up the majority of most of the 'private practitioner' re-enactors I encountered. This was true to such an extent that the state of being in an established 'coupled' relationship appeared the norm, and one could feel isolated if not conforming to this pattern. Although young single women, and men, join in these groups as well, I often heard a certain amount of joking attempts to pair up these 'singles' - always with other re-enactors, thus forming a new re-enactment couple. For example, when Gunnar's 'squire' took a liking to his sister, the relationship was approved and encouraged by the knight and other members of his household.

Reviewing these factors made me realize that the fact that my fiancé (later husband) had accompanied me on my initial forays to observe and meet re-enactment troupes had in fact stood in my favour. It may even have been a key factor in various groups' invitations to me to become a member. As a couple who both confessed an interest in re-enactment, although mine was academic and my fiancé's as a spectator, we were doubly attractive as recruits. By agreeing to join and participate in the group's events, we brought two bodies, or performers: one for the combat field, and another for the living history camp (though our gender did not necessarily determine which was which). But in addition, it is probably much easier to retain group members if *both* members of a couple are involved in re-enactment. Because of the demands of time, and of money, entailed in re-enacting, the dedication of both members of a couple is usually necessary to ensure the continued commitment and participation of either. As one Covenanting officer told me, 'if the wives are excluded, the men don't come'. This may be as much a reason behind the growth of emphasis on 'living history' camps and non-combat pursuits in re-enactment performances, as was the justification that these camps 'make it more realistic for the audience'.

Finally, the recruitment of couples also creates the potential for future recruitment of their offspring. Several of the groups I met have members whose children have been raised as 're-enactors' and now had reached the age of 16. This meant they were legally allowed to perform, and specifically fight, publicly. They had therefore been incorporated as group members and part of the performance. The training and discipline of such child members is another important pursuit.



Figure 16 - Ashild and Vigdis with nursemaid Aldis and household priest

Verisimilitude

A certain standard of appearance, including avoiding the wearing of makeup among women, keeping hair long and generally uncoloured and unpermed (and covered during performances), and facial hair for men, are generally adopted. Obvious anachronisms such as wearing a wristwatch are immediately pointed out and their removal sought. The conventions seemed stronger among those re-enactors who concentrated on 'private performances' or events held within homes or rented halls. But even among 'public performers', these rules were strictly adhered to for performance events, and women found wearing lipstick, or having their hair uncovered, could be pulled back and corrected. Interestingly, the wearing of beards seems almost universal among men engaged in 'private performance' activities, and is so ubiquitous as to be noted, with a certain amount of both pride and self-deprecating amusement, by the men themselves. In fact, this was used to distinguish themselves from the several women members of the group who have an alternate 'male persona', in which role they engage in combat and wear male 'garb'.

Appearance and authenticity become sources of inter-group rivalry and criticism when members of one group are seen to fail in their attempts at period accuracy. Especially

strongly condemned are groups whose efforts at re-enactment, whether in the content of their performances themselves, in their dialogue, or in their clothing, are seen to be attempting to play to, and thereby reinforce, audience stereotypes. My informants, who were usually quite passionate about the periods of history in which they engaged, could become quite heated about individuals or groups who 'wear tartan blankets and paint their faces blue' to portray Highlanders, or sported 'fake fur boots and cows horns on their heads' to portray Vikings. Knowledge of the technology, materials, and social practices of the period in question are seen to be the hallmark of 'real re-enactors', and distinguish them from both actors and from unknowledgable individuals in bad fancy dress. Examples of such 'faux pas' as wearing a velvet dress for an early medieval feast (the material had not yet been imported to Europe) or buttons on a Viking outfit (they apparently used button-like objects decoratively, but never to fasten clothes) were often pointed out to me, or remarked on to other re-enactors, with a mixture of amusement and disdain.

The use of non-period substances, materials or ingredients is constantly scrutinized. I suppose most Scots themselves are unaware that both the 'neeps and tatties' of the traditional Burns Night Supper are imports, from the New World and the Lowlands respectively, and would have been unfamiliar in the early middle ages. Cooking at feasts or 'living history' encampments is an ongoing challenge, and becomes more so when 'modern' demands such as adherence to a vegetarian diet come in to conflict. I personally will be happy never again to eat another rabbit stew (itself an anachronistic compromise, as the hare, not the rabbit, was native to early Britain), particularly unpleasant to this late 20th century American with a phobia of small bones and warm memories of a pet rabbit.

The insistence on 'correct' materials becomes a difficult challenge, especially to dedicated re-enactors (or researchers) on a budget. Cotton is another material that was non-existent in medieval Britain, and must be replaced by linen, a much more expensive material, in shifts, underdresses, and men's 'braies' or underclothes. Some re-enactors also insist that it must be hand-stitched, rather than machine-sewed, while others allow

that this is only necessary on seams that are externally visible, and still others said to me, 'Bosh! - if I were a medieval woman, and I had a sewing machine, I'd bloody well use it'. Although there was no consensus between groups, in general I found that the usual practice *within* each group was adhered to by all members.

Choosing your moment

In Scotland there are five key periods which are enacted by most groups: Viking, Medieval, Border Reiver, Covenanter, and Jacobite or Highlander¹³. These roughly fit the time frames, respectively, of the 9th century; the late 13th / early 14th period known in Scotland as the Wars of Independence; the 16th century, or what is referred to in England as the Tudor or Elizabethan period - the heyday of the turbulent Border conflicts; the 17th century period which is referred to in textbooks as the Cromwellian period or the English Civil War; and finally the 18th century up until the Battle of Culloden (1745) and its aftermath. Interestingly, several groups pointed out that the historical terms by which certain events or periods are known often differ on each side of the border between England and Scotland, much as my grandmother from Texas referred to the American Civil War as "the War between the States".

Although most of the groups I met specialized in one of these periods, two were more broadly-focussed. One Ayrshire-based group did public performances of Viking, Medieval and Covenanting events as long as these were connected with local history. Another, Edinburgh-based group, attributed its eclectic historic coverage to the different interests of its two original founders. What is interesting however is what links these widely divergent periods. I would argue that they can all be seen as 'crisis' periods, in which Scots were defending themselves, with varying degrees of success, against external invaders, rulers or creeds. As one re-enactor, Lachlan, told me:

There are basically three battles that define all of Scottish history - Stirling Brig, Flodden, Culloden. One we won, two we lost. Glorious defeat. And that tells you everything you need to know about our history.

¹³ I include a compressed history of Scotland in Appendix 1, in order to clarify periods, terms used, and just what it is that these societies are 're-creating'.

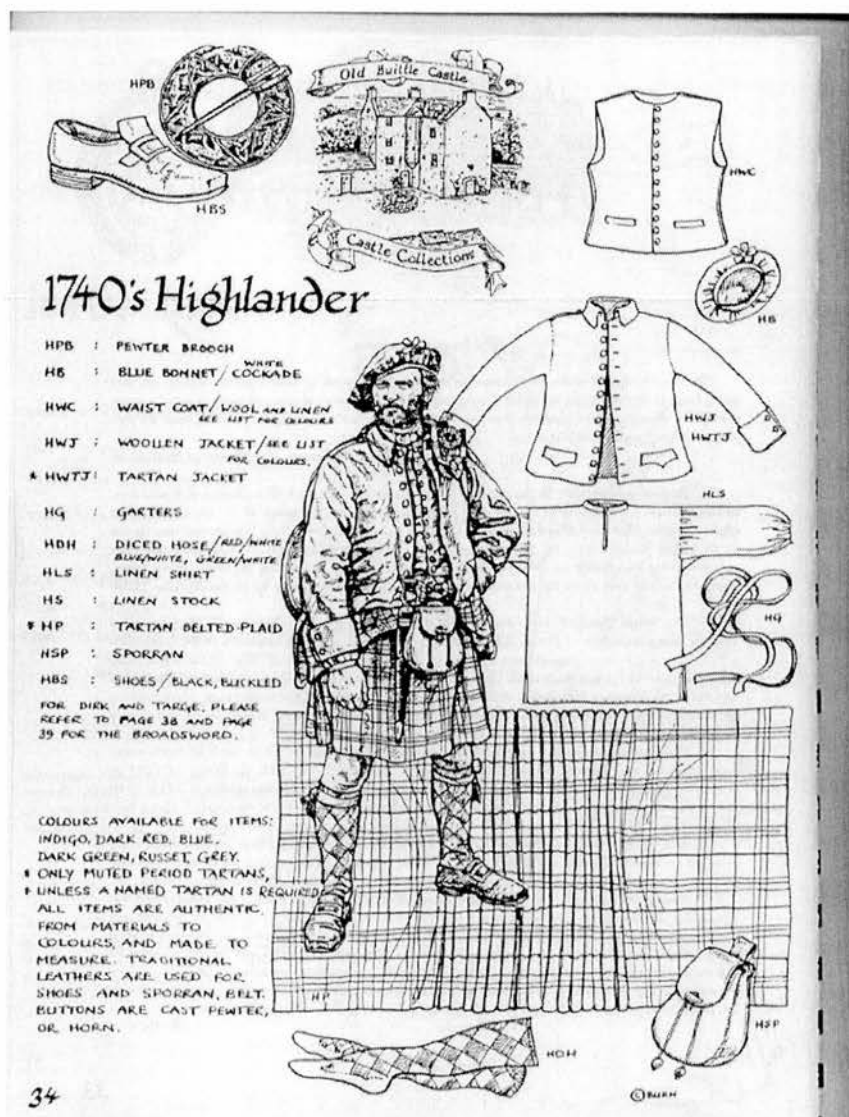


Figure 17 - Jacobite man, or Highlander, illustrated by Jeffrey Burns of Buittle Tower

Hierarchy vs Equality: Warbands, Regiments, and the Organisation of groups

‘Private performance’ groups may range from the loosely organized to those featuring aristocratic titles, ranks or ‘honours’ conferred upon members because of individual

achievement or service to the group¹⁴. Because they do not have to please an external audience, nor take into account 'market pressures' on the content of their performances, their focus may be varied or quite specific, and these groups have the greatest range of attitudes towards the contested issue of 'authenticity'. At one extreme, the group may concentrate on fun, or even frivolity, primarily feasting or fighting. On the other end of the scale, great attention is paid to serious scholarship. Examples of practices engaged in include research and testing of brewing techniques or recipes from a chosen period, the reconstruction of period instruments and deciphering of musical texts, along with interpretation of dance steps based on a combination of early texts and illustrations. Other interests include translating medieval poetry, sagas or song, medieval medicine and surgery, metalworking and leatherwork and the art of the 'soutar'¹⁵.

In general most groups, both private and public, seemed to have one male leader, often with a strong woman member sharing some responsibilities. The types of tasks they took on often differed, and a gender division was apparent. Key leading women in the groups tended to handle aspects of promotion, narration, education, camp deployment, supply and organisation. The male leaders concentrated on negotiating 'gigs' or public performances with outside sponsors, and on scripting shows and fight choreography. They were, in almost every case, the dominant fighters in all group performances featuring combat, and in almost every case, the scripted fights resulted in their victory. Although it was clear that the overall success of the groups and their public performances relied at least as much on the work of the women, it was often the men whose names and faces appear, for example, in the promotional literature such as Historic Scotland posters and brochures (see for example pages 12, 15, 24, 28 of Historic Scotland's *Events 2001* guide).

In addition to this male leader and key female member (who may or may not be a

¹⁴ These include 'knighthoods' for fighting prowess, or badges of membership in certain Orders, such as The Order of the Golden Spyder for weaving skills, or the rank of 'laurel' for accomplishments in Arts and Sciences.

¹⁵ A medieval term for shoemaker which is still used in parts of Scotland, and appears as a surname as well as a term for a native of the Borders town of Selkirk.

couple), there was usually a lieutenant or second-in-command who played an important role. In public performances before paying audiences, where combat scenes were the most common staple, it was necessary to have a well-trained fighter of equal ability to compete opposite the male leader (although, of course, to be defeated in the end).

Interestingly, I noted that in almost every group there was a member who played the part of the 'fool', or clown (sometimes, in medieval groups, they were actually given this formal title). This person might either be a junior or subordinate member of the group, who played the part of the 'butt' of jokes designed to relax group members before or after a performance, or entertain audiences. Within the group, the teasing or chastising of such an individual served to demonstrate and enforce group values and norms. However, it was sometimes the case that one of the more dominant members, often the lieutenant or second-in-command, played the role of clown or joker, again with the result of binding group members together, enhancing audience rapport, or demonstrating group values by commenting on transgressions. In these cases, however, the lieutenant who played the role of joker would not be the butt of jokes himself, but rather would target outside others - particularly members of rival re-enactment groups. In no case did I see a group leader, or any of the key women, take on this role of 'fool'¹⁶.

About the charismatic figureheads typical of almost every re-enactment group, Nick Finnigan, Events Manager for Historic Scotland, noted: "There is usually a star in each group - the reason the groups arise. They have a 'presence'." (Finnigan:1999, pers. comm). It is the importance, and dominance, of this charismatic individual to the coherence of the group which I think accounts for the way in which groups arise, split into new groups, or eventually die off. It is these (invariably male) leaders around whom

¹⁶ In writing this description of the social structure typical of most re-enactment groups, I suddenly became uncomfortably aware that it bears a striking resemblance to studies done of wolf pack social structures, which also feature dominant Alpha males and females - usually mated pairs; Beta males [in line for group dominance upon the death / injury of the Alpha leaders] and even 'clowns', individuals who are low on the social scale but who observers have found serve essential 'relaxation' and bonding functions. For this similarity, I apologize to the re-enactors, though I suspect many of them would be more pleased or amused than annoyed with my accidental analogy.

other re-enactors cohere, and who create the group ethos. They attract younger men, who wish to emulate them, into the group; they also tend to attract women who may perceive them as embodying knowledge and prowess. These virtues can indeed make them seem like 'real life' knights. However, it is largely in reaction to, or rebellion against, the dominance of this single individual that other group members (often experienced male members of the 'lieutenant' status) decide to split off and form their own groups. Disagreements over focus, presentation, style and resources may all spark off such conflicts.

Ultimately, however, it seems that many group members, who have joined voluntarily, who have made a lifestyle choice to which they have given a large commitment of time and money, and who may feel that they are as well-versed and able to 'interpret' their chosen period as the leader or dominant members, object to what they argue is a lack of, as they said to me, 'democracy' in the group organisation or management. Ironically, of course, modern notions of 'democratic' political representation were not typical of social organisation in almost any of the time periods the re-enactors had chosen to recreate.

Some groups, such as those portraying the Covenanters, openly declare their military-style hierarchy. Other groups seem to operate on the basis of a small-scale, benevolent 'chieftainship'. A potential member voluntarily aligns him or herself with a leader, but once having joined there is little choice but to accept that leadership, rather than contest or negotiate it. The alternative, more often than not, if personal or ideological differences are insurmountable, is to leave the 'protection' of that leader and try to form one's own group, leaving the original group with which one has formed bonds behind, with sometimes bitter results. Joining another group, for obvious reasons, is likely to lead to the same type of conflicts in the end. Prey therefore to frequent factions and infighting - often over issues of authenticity or commercialization - groups may collapse into schisms, leading individuals or sections of the troop to break away. The high value placed on comradeship and egalitarian values means that, when this is felt to have failed, members often 'vote with their feet'.

Group structure tends to reflect the main period portrayed, for example Viking or Anglo-Saxon troops form 'warbands' around war leaders or chieftains, while Civil War or Jacobite groups are divided into regiments with commanding officers. Those groups with a greater focus on domestic or civil society, however, may form into extended 'households', based on sponsorship or fictive kinship, or political structures based on kingship, with 'nobles' taking the title of 'baron', etc., and supervising a 'domain', albeit on a temporary basis, either through election or status achieved in combat.

A popular conception, prevalent also in re-enacting circles, of early European warbands is that they were egalitarian bands of comrades in which the leader was merely 'first among equals'. Enright's (1996) analysis of ancient Germanic and Norse warband structure, however, argues that this was a myth, maintained by an elaborate system of ritual practices within the warband so as to contain potential bloodshed. In the *Beowulf* saga, for example, the sharing of the mead cup, and the seating for guests and warriors, was strictly hierarchical:

the manner and place of sitting... suggests an apportioning of positions corresponding to rank... and reflected, aside from age and experience, the reputation of the fighter and the ruler's knowledge of his forebears (1996:11).

The phenomenon of a single social form generating conflicting ideologies is not unique however. Among the Kachin of Burma, the same myth was demonstrated to justify very different practices, one hierarchical -*gumsa* -and the other egalitarian - *gumlao* (Leach 1954). The irony is that re-enactors argue for an equality of access to history, and to the tools used to construct it. Unlike historians, however, they then attempt to use the 'time machine' they have constructed to 'step back into the past', a time when equality was rarely operational, or in which, to paraphrase Orwell, "some of us were more equal than others". Thus, like time-travellers, they carry their own anachronism with them. Lowenthal, in his analysis of time-travel fiction, notes that it is particularly iconoclastic scholars, those who are "eager to overturn conventional wisdom" (1985:23), who wish the advantage of 'visiting' the past. Too often, those same tales warn us, they thereby contaminate and corrupt what they sought to study.



Figure 18 - Example of Viking man's dress, illustrated by Jeffrey Burns

Because the structure of many groups is in perpetual conflict with the democratic ideals usually espoused by the members and by the larger 'mundane' society around them, this process of attraction, amalgamation and fragmentation occurs again and again, leading to an almost amoeba-like reproduction of new groups. Though it is outwith my area of expertise, I believe this may also reflect the way many millenarian movements, for example natavistic attempts to revive a glorified past (Linton 1943, Lindstrom 1996), and reformist religious cults (Cohn 1957, Hobsbawn 1959), form around charismatic leaders, but may frequently splinter and coalesce again around a new 'vision' or message.

The difficulty is that any re-enactment group seems to need a minimum critical number in order to survive and function efficiently. Whether a group engages in private functions, or in large-scale public performances, it requires enough members to take on the roles of cooks, cleaners, costumers, lecturers, dance or combat partners, and so on. If a group falls below a minimum number of active members, it dies. It is impossible to be a 're-enactor' in isolation, so individuals in groups which have disbanded need to align themselves with a new group or risk losing their identity as re-enactors. Therefore, recruitment is one of the most critical (although almost never openly discussed) aspects of re-enactment. One of the few exceptions I have seen to this lack of willingness to acknowledge the vital importance of recruiting new members was in an internal members' publication of the Sealed Knot Society (*Cheap and Nasty: The Organ of Fraser's Dragoones* No. 37 1998). In the 'Captain's Corner', which features a letter from the Regiment's Commander, he exhorts members to 'Carry on Recruiting'! He praises members for their emphasis on 'expansion', which he credits to the group's combination of "LH [i.e., living history] and fighting personnel... by putting us right in the faces of the public who have seen us this year and ... persuading them that this is a society and a regiment worth joining." (ibid:2).

Conflict and Schism - Proprietary Rights

A key source of contention is over ownership of ideas, techniques, fight 'moves', etc., what might be called 'intellectual property'. Groups fall out at times over what they see as 'theft' of 'their material'. Indeed, in one early show, while I was standing among a large crowd gathered at Stirling Castle taking notes, I was approached by a 'Highlander' group member who thought I was 'stealing ideas'.

An example of one idea which was 'borrowed' by one group was to give out 'parchment scrolls' at the end of a performance to all the children in the audience. The youngsters had been asked to participate in one scene in 'storming the castle'. The artificially 'aged' scrolls (stained with old tea bags) had been printed in an 'Old English' font, and left a

space to inscribe the child's name at the bottom. The woman who organized this admitted to me that she had gotten the idea from another group, but said 'they are from England - so they're not likely to come up here and use the idea'. If an occasion ever arose when both groups were participating in the same event, she said of course she'd think up another idea.

In addition to other sources of conflict, rivalry may stem from a perennial source, competition over scarce resources. In this case, it is not land, water, food, or women, but 'gigs', recognition, and reputation. Two of the better-known groups in Scotland, 'Ancient Ayrshire' and 'Albannach', whose members were once close friends, will now not even speak civilly to each other. Their enmity arose over just such a case of disputing 'commercial rights' to a performance element. I heard the story from several sources, and all agreed that Albannach, the more established of the two groups, had once helped the younger group to 'get gigs', recommending them for performance contracts, and had shared joint shows. But during one show, an 'extravaganza' in which several troupes had been invited to perform, a member of Albannach had ordered members of Ancient Ayrshire to pitch their tents elsewhere. He claimed that the prime central section of the field, where his group's tents were already set up, was 'their territory'. According to the tale as it was related to me, things became heated and 'hands were laid on sword hilts'. The events director of Historic Scotland, who had sponsored the event, was forced to step in and threaten that neither group would work in Scotland again if both did not back down immediately.

I believe that more than simply conflict over precedent, prestige and the desire to garner 'centre stage' lay behind this altercation. Earlier events had started to create splits between the groups. One woman had expressed her anger when, at an event held to commemorate the Massacre of Glencoe, members of her troop, 'Ancient Ayrshire' were invited to participate in ceremonies and wreath laying at the site, alongside Albannach, which specializes in the Jacobite Highlander period. She had attended in 'male persona', in *breacan faille*, or Highland pleated long kilt. The Highlander group, 'Albannach', allow only male members to speak or fight during performances. Their female members,

dressed in Highland *arisaid*, or plaid dresses over linen smocks, remain in the 'living history' tented section in the background of their shows. Albannach members objected strongly to Katrin's wearing of the kilt, claiming it was an 'affront to their Highlander ancestors' to see a woman in this garb. They then addressed the men in the rival Ayrshire group, demanding to know "how could you fight with women? what would happen if you slipped with your sword and cut their faces - how could you live with yourself?" Katrin, for her part, was insulted at their demand that she not be allowed to participate in the commemoration.

Deeper issues about the 'ownership' of history therefore preceded, and I believe lay behind, the eventual confrontation at the extravaganza, and conflict over proprietary rights may simply provide the spark for the collected tinder of ideological differences as groups try to 'carve out' their own version of history.

Labour and Management Conflicts

Most public performance groups originated not as semi-commercial enterprises but as either an individual's hobby or as the result of 'a bunch of friends just having fun'. However, a lack of clarity in monetary transactions sometimes caused friction when newer members arrived, and others left. Similar to arguments over marital property which may occur during a divorce, 'splinter' groups of re-enactors may disagree over, for example, possession of a tent or pieces in a collection of weapons or armour.

The older and more established re-enactment societies in Scotland, the Sealed Knot and the Roundhead Association, head off such problems by the use of legal formalities, application procedures, and membership fees. These are administrated by secretaries and treasurers. In 1999, the fee for an ordinary member of the Roundhead Association of the English Civil War Society was £18. In addition, the member was also required to be a paid-up member of a regiment of the Association, which entailed an additional £8 fee. Individual units of the ECWS also levied supplementary charges for weapons, equipment, transport, and administration as well as costumes. All members were required upon joining to provide either a helmet, or hat appropriate to rank, and a pike as

well as a musket or artillery piece. In the case of the Aberdeen regiment of the Sealed Knot, members were allowed to hire or borrow uniforms and weapons until they ascertained that they wished to remain with the regiment.

The Edinburgh group, The Realm, utilize money received as an 'educational' organisation to provide basic costumes for new members, and older members lend 'feast gear' and swords to newcomers. All of these groups, however, fall primarily within what I have termed 'private practitioners', even when, as with the SK and ECWS, they stage large-scale public events. These Civil War events do attract large crowds, but the proceeds of performances are donated to charity. The focus of each of these groups is upon the experience of the re-enacting members, rather than on the audience.

In other troops, however, pay disputes arise. Unlike private practitioners, public performers don't socialize "in garb", nor do they wear period dress for their combat training sessions. Strict rules of 'authenticity' apply only when in the public eye. For these groups, the gaze of the audience is essential. It is this emphasis on being 'performers', however, despite the fact that re-enactors distinguish themselves from actors, that leads to a concern with perceived profits. The extent to which a group actually does make money is one of the sources of dispute. In speaking to both group leaders and the ordinary 'rank and file' members, I realized that the perception among the latter that the group 'must' be making money - "look at the crowd, hundreds of people have turned out to see us" - had often led to struggles over labour and money.

Staging the Scene - Sites and Venues

In Scotland, there are two main sponsors of re-enactment events. These are the government agency Historic Scotland, and the National Trust for Scotland, a private organisation supported through its members' donations. Between them, these two organisations are entrusted with maintaining and interpreting a wide range of sites which have been left in their care. These range from cottages to castles, mill factories to stately homes. Of these, castles, tower houses, forts, cathedrals and ruined abbeys are the most popular sites at which to stage re-enactments. There is, however, as is the case with those bodies charged with caring for the natural heritage, national parks and scenic areas, occasional tension within these organizations. The debate is between those who wish primarily to preserve the properties in 'pristine' condition, which would, of course, mean excluding the public, and those who wish to encourage the public to visit in order to further their education about the importance of the sites (Nick Finnigan 1999 pers. comm.).



Figure 19 - a volley of musket fire at Buittle Tower

In addition, some private landowners also choose to allow, or sponsor, re-enactment events on their properties. This may arise out of a personal engagement with history or re-enactment, a commercial interest in attracting tourist visitors, or both. For example, Jeffrey Burns, who bought and restored Buittle Castle, once the seat of John Balliol in

the Scottish Borders, leads his own group of Border Reivers. They give public demonstrations of horsemanship on 'garrons', sturdy ponies of the type said to be ridden by Robert the Bruce. Burns also has his own catalogue and website providing goods ranging from tents to pots to jewelry, clothing and weapons to re-enactors.

Camping it Up - Warriors vs Weavers, or types of events

Tournaments, jousting, archery demonstrations, musket and cannon demonstrations, weapons exhibitions and hand-to-hand combat displays, are all part of what is loosely referred to as 'battle re-enactment', a mainstay of public performances of history. The reasons for this are perhaps two-fold. Firstly there is a fascination with warfare or martial arts through which many, especially young men, enter the world of re-enacting. "We're a' wee lads playin' at sodgers", as one man told me. An equally important factor is what audiences will pay to see. "We can't draw crowds with just weaving looms and harp playing", one of the key events organizers in Scotland told me (Finnigan 1999, pers. comm). Essentially, battles are spectacular in colour, volume, movement and dramatic and easily comprehensible narrative.

Generally associated with these large-scale events, particularly in recent years, is the 'living history camp'. These were formed to provide accommodation for the re-enactors when presenting two or three-day events at remote sites, and as an arena for presenting non-military aspects of the life of the period being displayed. This became increasingly important as larger numbers of women joined, as re-enactors married, and as their children also became involved. Camp life is an essential part of the pursuit of re-enactment, therefore, and the key area in which I observed the 'backstage' life of re-enactors at leisure.



Figure 20 - a simple spread of bread, cheese, meat and fruit

Feasts and picnics are also important events in the re-enactment calendar. Important ceremonies take place on these occasions, including the awarding of honours and titles. There are ‘bardic circles’, held in the evening, usually by candlelight, which are similar to feasts, except that they lack food and are more sedate. All the participants are expected to contribute to the entertainment, either by telling a story, reciting a poem, singing or playing an instrument. There are also ‘crusades’, which combine a pub crawl with a treasure hunt. A theme is chosen, such as a quest, or “The Pilgrimage of the Divinely Inspired Goose”, a reference, amazingly, to an actual historical event, one of the more bizarre of the medieval crusades. ‘Re-enactor-friendly’ drinking establishments are visited in the course of the ‘quest’. In the case of the previously mentioned crusade, participants followed a man who led the way with a goose puppet.

‘Backstage events’ such as workshops, lectures, dance rehearsals, combat practice sessions and programme planning sessions, take place throughout the year in order to socialize, train and teach new members, improve the skills of existing ones, and develop the group’s repertoire for those who engage in public performances. These events are, by their nature, ‘private performances’, often casual and humorous in nature. Practices of a more serious or ceremonial nature also take place, such as the formation of an ‘arch of

swords', used to honour key achievements of group members, including graduations and weddings . Weddings themselves are elaborate among re-enactors, who often base the celebrations on the period which they enact, and may require all guests to come 'in period'. I attended or was shown family photos of several 'period' weddings, set in Viking, medieval and 18th century dress.

Lastly, many groups have their own regular newsletters, to keep members informed of upcoming events, review previous ones, and pass on rules, recipes, humorous anecdotes and gossip, along with articles on historic topics. These texts offer a valuable insight into the cultural constructs of re-enactors and their way of 'being in the world'.

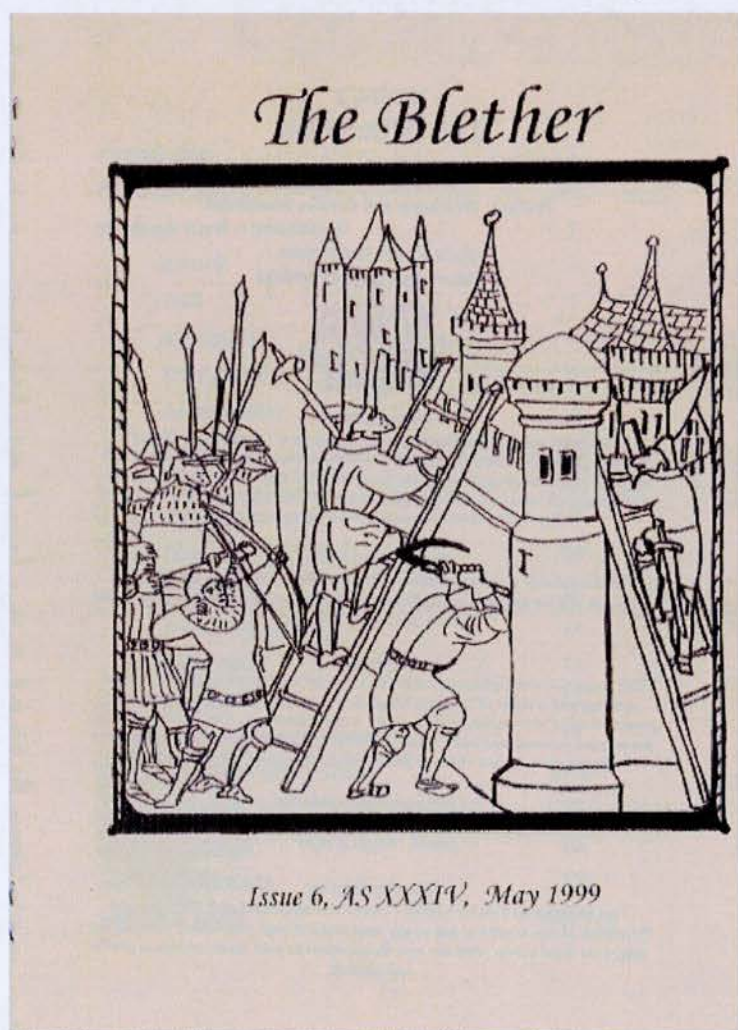


Figure 21 - The Blether, a publication of a Scottish medievalist group

Private Performances: Intimate Spaces and Invisible Kingdoms

Chapter Four: Combat Training & Fighting Prowess - Building the Army, Founding the Kingdom

The character of performance as accomplishment, together with its interactive quality and element of risk, make it easy to differentiate from the notion of 'text'... performances are ephemeral. They create their effects and then are gone - leaving their reverberations (fresh insights, reconstituted selves, new statuses, altered realities) behind them. Performances are a living social activity, by necessity assertive, strategic and not fully predictable. (Schieffelin 1998:198)



Figure 22 - men with eagle – a hunting bird reserved for kings

To the larger society, re-enactors remain invisible, or are known only through their public performances, such as large-scale battle re-enactments. It is in the private, 'backstage' (Goffman 1959) encounters among group members, however, that re-enactors are created, beliefs are expounded and enacted, and practices passed on. Here

the cultural world, the 'invisible kingdom' (Myerhoff 1990:248) of re-enactment is constructed and its laws and internal logic, its habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 1999), emerges.

Such private practices fall into two general categories: the first is teaching and training, which is the essential preparation and rehearsal stage which precedes any 'show', whether the performance is intended for public or private consumption. Peacock argues that performances must be seen as totalities, involving on and off-stage happenings as well as audience responses (1968:10). In fact, of the seven possible phases of 'performance sequence' delineated by Schechner (1990:4-5), only one, the performance itself, usually takes place publicly. The other stages, which include training, workshops, rehearsals, 'warm-up', 'cool-down', and 'aftermath', are dealt with in private spaces from which the 'mundane' world is generally excluded.

In addition to these pre- and post-performance stages, I will also include what I term 'private performances'. These take place within a closed circle: a known and knowledgeable, intimate elite. Generally celebratory and festive, these include feasts, picnics, 'bardic circles', betrothals, weddings, 'crusades', and Guards of Honour and Arches of Swords to mark events such as graduations or other 'rites of passage'. Private performances, I will argue, are a type of ritual performance: the operative theme, or metamessage, within these intimate spaces is "Let us believe" (Handelman 1977:187). This chapter will address the importance of combat training to the pursuit of historical re-enactment, while costuming, crafts, cooking & dance workshops will be described in the next. The last chapter in this section on private re-enactments will examine the most elaborate of private performances, the 'medieval feast'.

Making re-enactors - learning the drill

The work of creating the re-enactment world involves training and education of members as well as building the physical and social world around them: clothing, weapons, and tools must be made by hand, techniques taught, music, dance steps and recipes researched or recreated. Prior to publicly-performed enactments, scripts and fight choreography must also be planned and agreed upon. This is done through combat training sessions, lectures, informal meetings, and workshops on subjects ranging from 'kit-making' (i.e. sewing clothing or shoes) to music and dance, or cooking.

Perhaps most common of all are the combat training sessions, or 'fight practice'. All re-enactment groups meet regularly, some more often than others¹⁷, to practice the martial arts of their chosen period. Proficiency in combat skills, as well as knowledge of safety rules and courtesy, referred to as 'chivalry', are frequently, and critically, evaluated by opposing groups. However, the difficulty in finding venues in which to practice - these must generally be outdoors because of the space required, which renders re-enactors vulnerable to the Scottish climate, but must also be spaces which are closed to the public, for their own safety - means that few groups feel that they ever have satisfactory opportunities to perfect these arts.



Figure 23 - SCA members using rattan and wood weapons

¹⁷ (and some not as often as they should, according to my informants!)

Regardless therefore of historic period, size of group, public or private orientation, (or pursuit of other interests mentioned, such as arts and crafts or domestic skills), combat practices remain a common feature. This may include training in the safe use of cannon and musket, pike and halberd, bow and arrow or axe, but always includes the use of the sword. Different swords, of course, require different techniques: a short-pommeled Viking sword is swung single-handedly; the much longer medieval 'hand & a half' is so called because of its long pommel which could be wielded in a two-handed grip; the rapier is a thrusting weapon; the basket hilt of a 17th century Scottish broadsword can be used as a shield, both offensively and defensively¹⁸. For groups with an interest in more than one historical period, all these techniques must be learned, practiced, and passed on; in addition the moves used when pitting sword against another type of weapon, a polearm, or axe, for example, are also rehearsed.

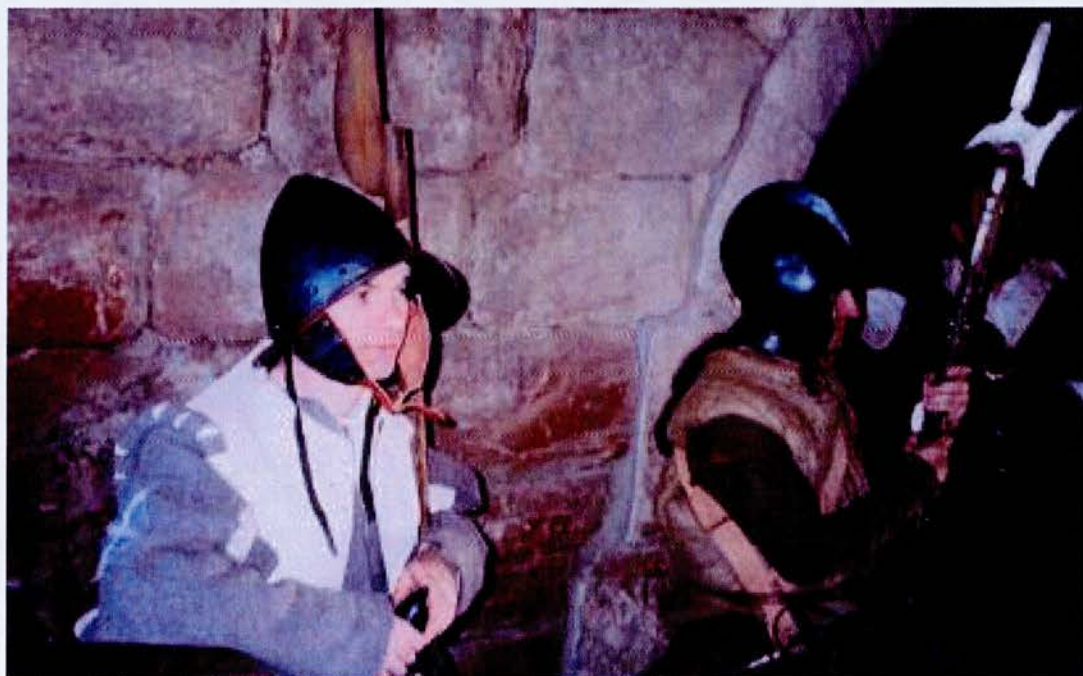


Figure 24 - Re-enacting the Border Reivers. Note the 'conquistador' style helmets worn by the soldiers.

¹⁸ According to a recent news item on Scottish television, there has been an upsurge in public interest in "the Scottish martial arts". Footage featured bearded men in *breacan faille* - the pleated long kilt - instructing learners in the use of the claymore (Gaelic for 'big sword'). The voice-over explained that films such as *Gladiator* had inspired in many a desire to learn ancient swordfighting skills, and some were coming to Scotland specifically to be trained in these. (ITV News, January 7th, 2002)

For those groups who engage in public demonstrations, staged fights and the exhibition of weapons and combat skills provide not only a means to draw audiences, but a way of educating, for example, explaining differences in the social class of those who used the weapons. The importance of combat in 'pulling the punters'¹⁹ is demonstrated by a collection of flyers and posters advertising public re-enactment performances at various castles. Though promising events ranging from medieval games and court life to falconry, all featured images of men with swords, or spears, or lances. Events staged by and for re-enactors themselves display a wider variety of images. The Templars' Faire in Essex illustrated its recent theme, 'Soutares and Clerces' (i.e. Shoemakers and Scholars), with medieval woodcuts of these professions being practiced. In addition to these 'external' reasons for focusing on combat, a love of martial arts, or the pursuit of 'war-gaming', was the chief reason for many to become involved with historical battle re-enactment. The majority of men I met through my fieldwork had initially been drawn, either by the camaraderie, or the martial element of re-enacting. In a recent magazine article, an interview with a re-enactor who took up swordfighting only after having children of his own, was subtitled "Living out boyhood fantasies" (*Historic Scotland* Autumn 2001:7).

Quite a few of the men, as well as one or two women, had entered re-enactment initially through the imaginary world of role-playing, or war-gaming. They had enjoyed the fantasy element of staging battles with characters represented by small figurines, and wanted to make this 'real', or at least physical, through donning the costumes and learning the use of weapons to actually practice what they had previously merely visualized. Others came from the opposite direction: they had engaged in fencing or a variety of Oriental martial arts, but wished to 'situate' their practice into a fuller context - in other words, add the imaginary element to what was already physically real. Martial arts are not, I must emphasize, the only route into re-enactment. Many of the women I met, unless they had become involved through their partners, were initially attracted by

¹⁹ An expression I heard often in Scotland, meaning 'gamblers' or 'paying customers' but sometimes, I believe, used with the connotation of 'suckers' and at other times 'ordinary guys'.

the costumes, or for others the music, of earlier periods. Several men I came to know said that a life-long love, or family involvement, in local history, had led them to join re-enactment groups, after which peer pressure to 'swell the battle ranks' led them to learn combat as well. These men found the re-enactment of battles a way of physically entering and engaging with their real love, history:

John of Carrick: Battle re-enactment's really good because you can find out lots as a historian from a battle re-enactment. For instance, the shields that I made... I added patches on the back, because I discovered what it was for, which is they pasted old, you know, pages out of the Bible or whatever, into the back of the shield. And I wondered why, until I discovered that if somebody hits your shield with an axe, the wood splinters come through, and you're in much more danger from splinters than you would be from the actual axe... So, the parchment stops the splinters in the shield, and all that happens is the axe smashes a bit of the shield, and the splinters stay where they are. So there was a reason for sticking bits of Bible in the backs of shields! You quite often find that something that doesn't make a great deal of sense - you know, why stick paper to the back of a shield - makes sense when you actually do the re-enactment.

Performance techniques, the arts of performance as distinct from written scripts, for example, are almost always passed on orally (Schechner & Appel 1990:5). In the traditions of Asian performing arts, as in athletic coaching in the West, skills are handed down to a younger generation by experts in the particular genre: "[t]hey transmit their 'secrets'... [and] are respected for their records, singular achievements which reflect their mastery of technique" (ibid 5-6). This is also the pattern which occurs in re-enactors' combat training. Groups, or especially individual fighters, acquire reputations which draw new recruits to them. Public performances of combat skills are one of the chief ways of demonstrating these skills to potential new members. Private training sessions are opportunities to inculcate not only rules and techniques of combat, but values and attitudes expected of those brought into the re-enactment world.

Several anthropologists have examined the ritual aspects of sport, ranging from Aztec ballgames to football Cup Tie Finals to the theatricality of the Spanish bullfight (Schechner 1990). In common with such sporting events, combat training and battle re-enactments can be seen as intensified forms of theatre, in which emotional or psychological risk²⁰ (Schieffelin 1998) hardens into real physical danger (Hughes-Freeland & Crain 1998: 14).

Turner has noted that some cultures use ritualized violence as a means of dramatizing and redressing conflict, and gives as examples the stick-fights of the Nuba in the Sudan, and the island single-combat, or '*holmgang*', in Iceland (Turner 1990:9). He argues that such organized combat may work to enhance group unity, enabling antagonists to become aware, through their mutual participation in a sanctioned and controlled performance, of the common principles that bind them. During stylized sword practice sessions the values of 'chivalry': fairness, restraint, respect for those both weaker, or more senior, are practiced as well. In addition, a sense of humour, of 'mutuality', or group spirit, and verisimilitude, or the group's attitude towards strict authenticity, are all imparted.

Combat practice fields are essentially liminal spaces, "milieus detached from mundane life" (Turner 1990:11) in which recruits experience physical ordeals, and sometimes humiliation, and in which they must internalize seemingly paradoxical instructions. For example, a 'good fighter' not only demonstrates speed and strength, but must be able to perform convincing 'killing blows', moves and strikes which would be intended to kill, but which are 'pulled' so that they (at least ideally) connect lightly against the opponent's body. Despite this, minor injuries (the occasional broken bone, sword cuts to the hand or face) do occur. Barba and Savarese draw parallels between theatricality and martial arts, arguing that dance and many other types of performance require physical training in what they term "extra-daily body techniques" which may ultimately derive from combat:

²⁰ E.g., the risk that "I may become angered / humiliated / embarrassed / shocked / aroused / grief-stricken".

martial arts use concrete physiological processes to destroy the automatisms of daily life and to create another quality of energy in the body. Martial arts are based on acculturation technique, that is, on a form of behaviour which does not respect the spontaneity of daily life... by means of repetition of physical actions [this] leads the student to another awareness of themselves and to another use of their bodies (Barba & Savarese 1991:197)

Not only do the transmission and internalisation of theatrical moves and gestures resemble those of combat, but even the content of some performances may directly imitate battles. Barba & Savarese cite examples dating back to Ancient Greece,²¹ and note that “certain markedly mimetic medieval European dances also derived from armed and soldier dances” (1991:200). An interesting example is the 16th century Italian *danza della spada* (dance of the sword), which dramatised the conflict between the Christians and the Moors (representing, respectively, civilisation and barbarity). This dance later spread throughout Europe, becoming the *morisca* in Spain, the *mauresque* in France, the *mohrentanz* in Germany, and the *morris dance* in England!

Within these training sessions, it is generally the group leader, sometimes aided by his lieutenant or second-in-command, who takes on the role of instructor. It is important to note that it is often the charisma, or reputation, of the group leader which both serves to keep the group together and to attract new recruits. In Peacock’s study of Elders, or travelling preachers, among the Primitive Baptists of southern Virginia, he discovered that the congregation’s background knowledge of the elders’ careers and biographies shaped their experience of their sermons: an individual’s reputation meant that his listeners “hear that wider reality which he represents and in which they participate but in which, unfortunately, we do not” (Peacock 1990:218). I believe that a similar process occurs when new recruits gather to ‘hear the teachings’, and witness the performance, of an acknowledged combat master.

²¹ They cite Socrates, who declared that “the man who dances best is the best soldier”. Interestingly, many of the re-enactors in the Edinburgh group who were the best dancers were also excellent sword fighters.

Private 'performances' or rehearsals such as combat training share, then, several features of ritual: they are liminal spaces, in which a hidden, but wider reality is experienced and evoked. One further feature underlines the transformative power which such sessions share with sacred ritual, and which is brought about by the control and intensity of awareness required when training with dangerous weapons:

Heightened concentration and focus on a delimited aspect of reality has the effect of excluding all but the central experience: this obliterates ordinary consciousness: critical, cognitive, perhaps even cynical and solipsistic - the very attitudes that destroy the possibility of belief.
(Myerhoff 1990: 247)

Thus the practice of sword fighting and other combat techniques serves, not only to 'build' a re-enactor, but to break down their resistance to the worldview of re-enactment; to bring them into the fold of believers. Ritual and theatre alike require a suspension of disbelief because they are themselves suspended between reality and imagination (Myerhoff 1990). Ironically, despite re-enactors' own emphasis on the elusive goal of 'authenticity', the success of their efforts depends upon their ability to put aside actuality. The manner and methods through which these transformations are achieved, and the degree to which they succeed, will be examined in the next section.

Down in the Plague Pits

On a freezing cold Edinburgh day in February, with a bitter north wind blowing, two local groups met for their weekly combat practice on a small patch of hilly ground on the far western edge of the parkland which stretches along the southern border of the university. Because the ground is so uneven, it is unsuitable for football, or for the golf played at the nearby links. It was one of the re-enactors, Ragnhild, who explained to me the reason for the unusual topography of the area. These are the former plague pits, where victims of the bubonic epidemics that ravaged the city centuries earlier were interred in mass graves. Strangely, it is not the raised humps which hide these pitiful sites, but the bowl-like, sunken depressions: “the bodies were heaped up and covered, but after they decomposed it all sank in like that”, she told me.²² This place, shunned at the time and undesirable for most recreational purposes now, resounds almost every Sunday afternoon with the clash of sword and axe. The recessed hollows serve to hide the combatants from passersby on the main roads.

The group considered themselves fortunate to have a centrally-located site in the city. The trials of finding appropriate venues for both practice sessions and tournaments and feast events had been highlighted in a rather plaintive invitation received from a re-enactment group in Germany (many re-enactors travel widely throughout Europe to attend events). The organizer explained that they had been unable to find a suitable location for their Crown Tourney, and had been forced to book a military base which would not allow smoking or drinking alcohol (a great disappointment to them) and would restrict numbers to no more than 200. Sir Gunnar’s group also had been forced to find a new venue for their last feast, when the church hall they had been using passed stricter fire regulations, banning candles which are essential for creating the proper period atmosphere.

²² Later that spring, I found myself dancing in a ring in one of the circular hollows, holding hands with Ragnhild’s two small daughters and singing “ring a round a rosie, pocket full of posies, a tissue, a tissue, we all fall down”. Only afterwards did I realize how macabre - though possibly appropriate - this was.

Ragnhild, who is an acknowledged swordswoman, had explained that one must never thrust a sword into the ground, an offence non-re-enactors were often committing - possibly for the satisfaction of feeling the sword penetrate something yielding, she wondered? She indicated that this not only showed disrespect to and lack of care for the sword, but was particularly dangerous here because she believed there was still a risk of active germs being present in the soil of the mass burials. She also advised me to get a tetanus shot if I was planning to come and fight regularly.

The quality of, and care for, swords are frequent topics of discussion and sometimes disagreement. Once, a Spanish re-enactor had written to Gunnar's group asking about advice on buying 'authentic scotish [sic] claymores'. Scotland is apparently seen as a 'source' of real knowledge on this subject, despite the centuries-long tradition of sword-making in Toledo, Spain. The group was swift to advise the Spaniard, who had adopted the Irish Celtic persona of 'CuChulainn'²³ to "avoid all the rubbish along the Royal Mile - the stuff they sell isn't properly hardened and they're overpriced as well."

Weapons-grade steel, they explained, is hardened by being folded while still molten and then beaten flat, and this process repeated several times, in order to provide flexibility as well as strength. Re-enactment swords, I was later told, lie somewhere between real weapons and stage 'prop' swords. Real steel weapons, of course, are intended to be lethal. Anything which could be done to render them more damaging would be. Alec, head of a popular re-enactment performing group on the West coast, told me that in the past blades and arrowheads would often be dipped into faecal matter before going into battle - so that even a minor cut would be likely to become infected, and eventually fatal. The ridge down the centre of a sword was designed to help release the blade from a wound - otherwise the suction created by being embedded in flesh would make it difficult for the swordsman to pull his blade free from the body of his victim and thus delay his next assault, or prevent him from parrying an attack. Such weapons were designed to penetrate flesh, in other words.

²³ A legendary figure from Irish Celtic mythology. Re-enactors I met in Scotland did not generally take on actual historical, or legendary, personas.

Stage swords, in contrast, are designed to look good and make noise. In a choreographed swordfight for a film or stage play, the opponents will try to strike their blades together, which creates dramatic clashes. The blades must be light enough to be used by actors, who are not trained in combat. Re-enactor's swords, however, are the full weight of real weapons, but have blunted edges. They are primarily used to strike against the armoured and protected portions of an opponent's body. A successful re-enactor will attempt to get past his opponent's guard and land blows on his body (although not generally full force if using steel weapons) - a 'clash' is only heard if the opponent has successfully parried.

The number of people at training sessions always varies, and on this particularly "Baltic" day (to use the local vernacular for 'frigid') there were fewer present. Participating in the actual fighting were, to use their 'persona'²⁴ names, Ragnhild & her spouse Gunnar, Rhodri, (Gunnar's squire), Wolfgang, Caitlin "Padraig when fighting" de Courcy²⁵ and her husband, Otto, and Eireann, a young American who was new to the group. Aldis, foster daughter²⁶ in the fictive household of Ragnhild, was across the field looking after Vigdis and Ashild, Gunnar and Ragnhild's two small daughters, aged 2 and 4. The 'Gunnarsdottirs', as they were known in the Norse style, were fidgeting and asking to be allowed to go home because of the cold. Assisting Aldis in her task (made more difficult because the girls at this age object to their mother participating in combat, and attempt to hang on to her skirts while she is fighting) was Molly, another young American new to the group, who was currently dating Ieuan ap Arthur, squire to Sir Niall Maclochaidh.

²⁴ In addition to persona names, nicknames are commonly used, often to display the re-enactor's martial prowess, such as 'Uncle Vicious', 'Gelfling', 'Anvil', 'Eric Bloodaxe'

²⁵ A reference to a common practice among women re-enactors to adopt male personas for the purpose of participating in combat.

²⁶ "The custom of fosterage, disapproved of in the canon law but widespread in the Celtic areas of Britain for many centuries" (MacQueen 1998: 280) was reproduced in the fictive medieval household structure utilised by several private re-enactment groups in the Lothian and Lanarkshire areas.

Sir Gunnar had been sparring with his squire for over an hour when I arrived, and he and Ragnhild soon decided to call an end to the day's training and give in to their daughters' demands to return to their nearby home and escape the weather. I remained behind and observed and photographed the process of 'suited up', as Otto, Eireann, Wolfgang and Caitlin / 'Padraig' prepared to take the field to begin their practice. This also gave me the opportunity to examine the construction of the combatants' 'suits of armour'. I discovered that Wolfgang's breastplate was made, not as I had thought, of steel, but of jointed and riveted PVC plastic! This comes in sheets, and is moldable if heated. The re-enactors therefore heat it before moulding it to the body.

I asked about the level of protection this would afford in practice, and was assured that it would protect against both "soft" weapons (the type favoured by members of SCA, of whom Otto, Caitlin and Wolfgang were all members) and blunt-edged "live steel" swords, and even cuts from nicked or accidentally sharpened blades. The materials used in making weapons is one of the central differences between the SCA, which originated in California but now has 'kingdoms' throughout Europe and Australia, and native British re-enactment groups. The so-called 'soft' wooden or bamboo weapons favoured by SCA members, often wrapped in silver duct tape for padding and to prevent splinters, are used in "full contact" style - blows are not pulled. SCA members argue this adds to an 'authentic' experience for participants, who battle full force. Most of the groups I worked with, however, use forged steel weapons, which they term 'live steel', modified only in having blunted edges. They argue that the skill and strength needed to wield these safely provides a more historically accurate, and authentic, experience.



Figure 25 - these padded jackets are worn under chainmail. For poorer ranks such as foot soldiers, however, they were the only protection.

This brought a question to my mind, and I asked if any folks they knew actually fought with purposely sharpened steel swords. Gunnar said that from time to time they'd hear of a group that did. He remarked that there was "supposedly a group of nutters in Iceland" who did, but admitted that it might be "an urban myth making the rounds of re-enactment groups". Before they left, Gunnar and Rhodri both showed me their swords. Gunnar's was much more nicked, which he explained was because the steel wasn't as good - it was too soft. He said they used flexible steel, to take blows without snapping, and rounded edges on the blades, not only to avoid injury, but because when the swords struck against each other they made only U-shaped indentations, rather than V-shaped nicks which were more dangerous to combatants and harder to smooth out. Gunnar also explained that the nicks on his sword could be beaten out, but required a ball hammer and 'anvil': a piece of steel like a large nail driven into wood: this gives a steel base for hammer blows, but wood to absorb shock, and is cheaper than a huge solid steel anvil.

He also demonstrated a quick and simple method for removing nicks from the blade ‘in the field’: reversing his chainmail gauntlet (because the palm side is padded with sueded leather, to provide a better grip), he ran the blade through his hand, filing off nicks and smoothing the edge.

During combat training, members frequently give and seek advice about the purchase, maintenance and construction of weapons and armour. For example, an older member may give a new one tips on improving their chainmail links, or on the best blacksmith or forger from whom to buy a prospective new weapon. During one combat practice I attended, a young member proudly showed me the beginning of a ‘mailcoat’ he was making. He had completed a ‘strip’ about two inches in depth, and to the circumference of the finished garment. It had taken him, he said, approximately 7 hours’ labour to reach that stage. While re-enactors who own plate armour must buy it from specialist re-enactment armourers or blacksmiths, all re-enactors I met make their own chainmail armour because it must be made to fit closely to the body, while plate armour is attached with leather straps and buckles which allow more adjustment. Though armourers are highly valued in the re-enactment community, there is much debate about the merits of individual practitioners, focusing either on the quality of their work or their reliability in providing commissioned items. Strangely, several of the west coast contacts insisted that the best armourer was based in Edinburgh, and that they regularly visited his shop if they travelled to the east, while Edinburgh-based groups informed me that the local product was of poor quality and that they recommended a Glaswegian smith. A criticism levelled at rival groups was often that “they buy from so-and-so - he’s rubbish”.



Figure 26 - repairing chainmail



Figure 27 - aketons & helmets in a tent – note the earlier period helm with cheek and noseguard to the rear, later medieval kettle helm in foreground

The search for good quality armour and weapons is not simply a matter of appearance, but is essential for safety as well. Accidents are common during combat performances in which pikes and spears snapped, sword blades were shattered, and axe heads flew off of handles which had split. These incidents are not only a financial loss but extremely dangerous, as they cannot be anticipated and serious injuries may result. Thus, new weapons acquired are a source of pride - at one west coast combat practice I attended, a 'Viking' proudly showed off two new axes he had bought at a cost of £50 pounds for the pair. He pointed out their folded-steel heads and heavy-duty hickory shafts. They were big, but not as large as Dane axes.²⁷ As others gathered around to admire and ask to handle them, and inquired who had made them, and for how much, another member then revealed that he had been given a supply of oak staves, which could be cut into lengths suitable for axes, maces or war hammers. This was also handled and admired, and the heaviness and grain remarked upon, as this wood is considered a good choice for weapon handles and less likely to split. Some re-enactors can discuss at great length the different types of weapons and uses of them in the different periods. 'Hugo', for example, mentioned the difference between a broadsword and a rapier: the latter having an extremely narrow blade and sharp point for thrusting, the broadsword being a slashing instrument with a duller point, the sharpened side being the killing edge of the weapon.

²⁷ Dane axes have shafts long enough that a man can tuck the head under his armpit and lean on it as the axe rests on the ground - rather in the manner of a crutch. 'Hrolf' once declared, "the Dane axe is like a nuclear weapon - if you have to use it you've already lost". I understood that it is a destructive and offensive weapon whose main deterrent power is in its appearance: while effective in chopping down walls, buildings, or people, its weight and the broad swing required to wield it mean it has little defensive use against an opponent armed with a sword.

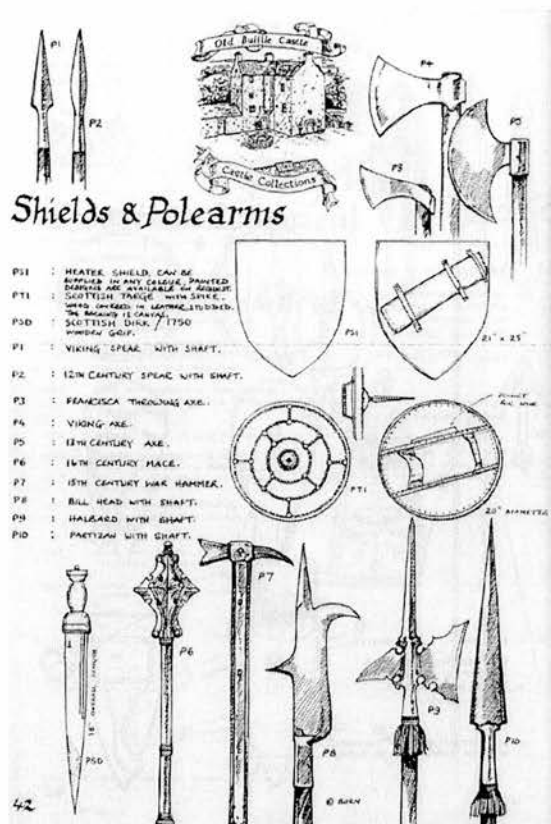


Figure 28 - types of polearms, or long hafted weapons, including a Dane axe (top right)

“He fights like a Frenchman” - evaluating performances

During the practice in the Edinburgh plague pits, Wolfgang explained that the plastic armour plating he was using on this occasion was cheaper than steel and importantly, much lighter weight, making it less tiring for long practice sessions. Though I knew that both Otto and Gunnar owned full plate steel armour, another advantage of using the PVC armour, it soon became apparent, was that it doesn't become as hot - or on this occasion, as cold - as metal.

Because of the day's bitter weather, there was great difficulty in donning helmets, as the extreme cold had actually caused the metal to contract. Fighters wear linen 'arming caps' under their helmets and chainmail headdresses, to provide padding and insulation,

and absorb sweat²⁸ and keep it from running into their eyes - which on the battlefield could prove life-saving. These caps also serve to keep chainmail links from tangling in their hair. Padded linen or canvas jackets - variously called gambesons, aketons, or arming doublets, depending on style and period - serve the same function under chainmail or plate armour. However, like almost all the male re-enactors I met (except for the very youngest), Wolfgang was thickly bearded. When he pulled on his chainmail headdress - which looks much like the balaclavas favoured by skiers and bank robbers, and is designed to protect the sides of the face, throat, and nape of the neck - it tangled in his beard, adding to the discomfort of the icy wind and cold metal.

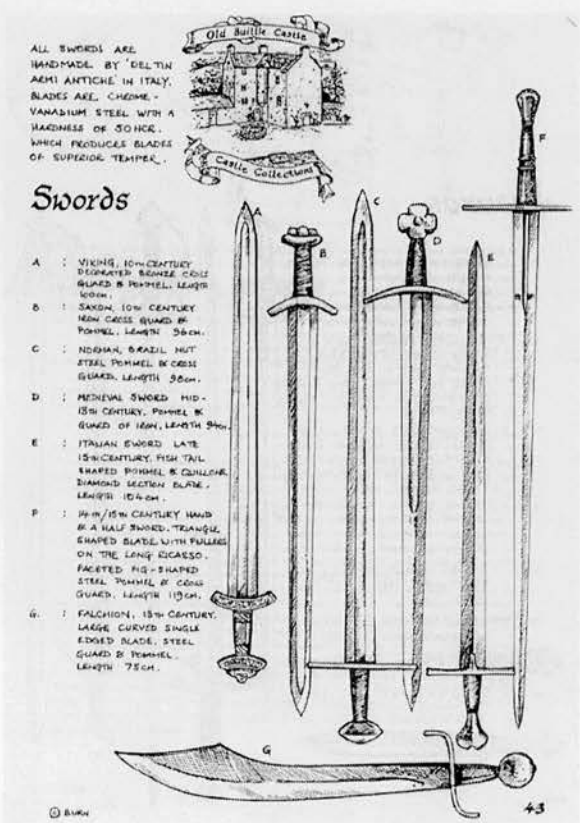


Figure 29 - types of early sword, from Viking through Norman, and an example of a type encountered in the Crusades

²⁸ One of the characteristic odors of re-enactment is of the dried sweat and mildew which collects after years of hard practice sessions and camping in damp tents - it is one which would be very familiar to those who practice the Japanese martial art of *kendo*, which utilizes bamboo swords and similarly heavily padded cloth armour.

Caitlin / Padraig, of course, had no such problem - in fact, one of the jokes that was currently going the rounds of the group was to ask why "that dodgy wee lad Padraig - he looks like a girlie!" - still hadn't begun to sprout a beard: something no self-respecting male re-enactor should be seen without! Since 'Padraig's' own squire was absent, I stepped in to help situate 'his' chainmail headdress, which because of its weight should be held suspended over the knight's head while he works it over his hair and face. The process of preparing for practice is a time-consuming, labourious and often painful one, even before any blows are exchanged.

Wolfgang then came over to me and showed off his late 15th century 'garb'. He pointed out that the rivets on the jointed plates of his armoured jerkin were not merely protective, but were placed decoratively. A pattern of crosses was formed by the brass studs as they projected through the brown suede leather, and more studs outlined the decorative tab flaps along the bottom hem, forming an overall pattern which could be seen throughout. He admitted with modest pride that he had made the jerkin himself. In addition he wore a faded red, padded gambeson, with a chainmail apron-like extension protecting the groin area. Gieves protected his lower legs, with jointed metal over the knees, and further armour on the upper thighs. Over the padded tunic he layered the brown leather jerkin, which had armoured joints (of PVC) sewn inside, then arm guards, elbow protectors of jointed metal, shoulder guards, the chainmail headdress, a thickly padded neck guard front and back, and finally a helmet.



Figure 30 - interior of arming jacket, with reinforcing plates

Many male re-enactors I met took great pride, not only in their swordsmanship, but in their seamstress skills, happily demonstrating their newest piece of sewing, embroidery, or leatherwork. This is perhaps less surprising than it at first seemed; Roach & Eicher note that the “individual can derive aesthetic pleasure from both the act of creating personal display and from the contemplation of his own display and that of others” (1979:7) and that furthermore, such adornment itself may be a form of recreation, requiring and displaying the possession of leisure time and indicating a break from routine (ibid:19). So widespread is this urge for distinction through display that Cannon argues for it as a universal human trait, against the ‘myth of traditional conservatism’, noting that beads found in Paleolithic burials “are a testimony to a common human desire to gain recognition as a separate identity by setting oneself apart visually” (1998:24).

Caitlin’s outfit was similar to Wolfgang’s, but she wore a once-elegant, beige and white brocade tunic of 15th century design, now faded through ‘battle fatigue’. It had wide shoulders which tapered to narrow closely fitted sleeves, and the tunic laced up the front. Her jerkin was black suede, also with interior armoured plates (of black PVC) sewn inside. Caitlin said they ‘should’ be wearing Norman-style helmets, with simple nose-

guards, for authenticity. Instead they wore helmets with rather full grills which reminded me of those worn by American football players, extending over the entire face for protection. Although some group members do choose to spar in ordinary sports clothing - loose jogging pants and sweatshirt, for example - most experienced re-enactors choose to be 'garbed' - in correct period dress for the weapon and fighting style they are rehearsing. Having such clothing not only provides protection for the fighters, but I believe expresses their rank and status within the group - only more senior fighters will have the time and expertise to have amassed all of the proper 'gear'. Brydon & Niessen note that the complex act of altering the body through dress "negotiates between the intensely personal and the prescribed and constructed layers of the social" (1998:xi). Elaborate 'garb' also serves to differentiate wearers from 'mundane' practitioners of martial arts, signalling their acquisition of a whole range of skills and knowledge in addition to the use of weapons and fight techniques. Cannon has argued that "[v]irtually any situation that creates social uncertainty can lead to the elaboration, diversification and emulation of distinctive forms of expression" (1998:25).

As the wearers of clothes, we have the latitude to perform,
but also the ineluctable burden of performance: we have
no option but to be on the social stage over which most
people typically have little control. (Brydon & Niessen 1998:xii)

Because Otto had injured his knee during combat practice three weeks earlier he was forced to stand back from the fighting, and helped the new member Eireann by allowing him to try on his own suit of armour. After watching Wolfgang and Caitlin for some time, I inquired about the system of scoring points. Otto explained that in their group a hit to the head is usually counted as a killing blow: the 'injured' fighter is down and out. When I asked the combatants themselves who they felt was 'winning' their sparring session, I was surprised when Wolfgang responded that Caitlin was. I had thought he had landed more head blows, and wondered if this was an example of the much-vaunted code of chivalry in practice - that he was treating 'Padraig' as he would do 'Caitlin' - but of course I couldn't ask this. Re-enactors are not always so courteous in combat. During one session, 'Hrolf' declared disparagingly of an opponent, "He fights like a Frenchman!", in other words that his blows were weak and effeminate.

Caitlin then noted that she'd struck Wolfgang in the legs many times, which, she said, "according to our rules, means he has to fight from his knees", as if he were crippled and unable to move. Wolfgang, however, was choosing to take these as minor injuries and keep fighting, to keep the sport interesting and keep practice going - and keep warm! Because ducking and moving is one of the main defensive tactics, he claimed he would not be able to defend himself well from a kneeling position, and this would swiftly curtail their practice. Furthermore, he explained, different weapons required different fighting styles: he was using his long "hand-and-a-half" sword (held using two hands) both for attack and defensive moves, which required swift footwork. Caitlin, on the other hand, with her single-handed sword and a buckler, or small round shield, could use the shield to defend herself even from a kneeling position, and still be able to swing a sword with her free hand.

Discussion about scoring led to a conversation about 'fair play'. Eireann said he understood it was basically up to the person who is struck to determine the severity of the blow and acknowledge a real hit. Some people, he told me, try to avoid doing this fairly, and will take repeated severe blows without acknowledging any of them:

we call them 'rhinohides' in the States. People get to know who they are, and try not to practice with them; no one will spar against them in tournaments, and the marshals get to know who they are, too.

Otto then added,

It's really self-policing; most of the people who are attracted to the society are honest. It's really based on the idea of chivalry.

Otto also said that if fighting with a friend, both may choose to agree to give and take strong blows, but if fighting with someone unknown one should never strike hard.

Other groups have their own system for marking off 'Learners' and determining the difficulty level at which combats should be fought. One English-based group which has

several off-shoots in Scotland requires beginners to display yellow tags on their weapons, so that opponents know to be cautious and 'go easy on them'. Beginners, or 'yellow taggers', are only upgraded, and allowed to remove the 'learner' tags, after participation in several events where their skill level can be tested. These events are always held in England, where the group was first founded, and one Scottish member told me an amusing anecdote. He had joined a small group of about 8 fighters which had been founded by a former English group member who had moved to Glasgow. Although they practiced regularly, and had gotten 'quite good', they had been unable to travel to England to any official events, and so had not been able to be upgraded, or remove their tags. Eventually they were able to organise a trip south to participate in their first 'big skirmish':

You shoulda seen this bunch of knights - they got drawn against me and my guys, and you could see they saw our tags and were thinkin', 'this is gonna be easy, a bunch o' yellow-taggers'. Then next thing you know they're pinned down with our spears at their chests trying to figure out how we got past their shields.

Throughout my conversation with Otto, he had been helping Eireann try on his armour: tying on the elbow guards, and shoulder guards, with cords attached to the inner padded jacket. Then he helped him on with the jointed padded tunic, which got stuck on the metal elbow joints, and he observed "it's better to put this on first" - before attaching the arm, elbow and shoulder guards. I remarked that it must be impossible to put on without the help of a squire or other assistant, but Otto answered that some suits of armour are more easy to put on by oneself, and that often, and especially in summer, he just leaves the guards in place tied onto the padded jacket and slips into the whole thing at once. He said he can get into it in 10 minutes, whereas to Eireann it was borrowed and unfamiliar gear and thus more difficult to get accustomed to.

During a lull in the fighting, Caitlin said she believed the scoring system was a kind of mix, or intermediary, between being a sport, and a military combat technique. Their group 'counted' certain blows as meaning certain things; basically any direct hit to the head, even if the opponent was wearing a helmet, was usually counted as lethal, as if it

had been done with a sharp edged sword. But she admitted that it was difficult to know what 'lethal' really would be, or would have been, since that obviously cannot be practiced. Certainly, she said, we know that 'they' - people of the past, our 'ancestors' - had practice jousts in which they did not intend to kill each other, but only demonstrate prowess; therefore they must have had non-lethal point scoring systems as well. As I was standing and observing, rather than fighting, I soon grew too cold to remain, and went on to join the 'Gunnarsdottirs' and other members of the 'household' to drink and chat.

I believe that this session demonstrated many of the conflicts which arise, and values and ideals which re-enactors attempt to sustain in their 'imagined kingdom', to use Myerhoff's (1990) phrase. Perhaps chief among these is the dilemma of striving for 'authenticity' while observing modern standards of comfort, safety - and legality. In addition, the importance of chivalry, of honour, of passing on knowledge and sharing, were all revealed. Finally, the importance of appearance - in grooming and dress - and the importance of the extended household, in such tasks as sharing child-minding duties, also became clear. Combat training meetings, perhaps the most frequently-held and widespread of re-enactment practices, were not simply opportunities for play or competition. In the course of building the 'invisible kingdom' of historical re-enactment, an army of labourers is essential - and it was largely through such sessions that this workforce was enlisted, indoctrinated, and drilled. One re-enactor wrote of the bonds formed during such exercises, and of the conflict which later severed them:

Old friend we both remember
All the times we stood together
Side by side in many battles
Where we shared the glow of victory
And mourned for comrades lost
All the dice we played and cups we drank
On long winter evenings long gone

But when lines were drawn up for the quarrel
And we stood on the opposite sides
When the words that were spoken divided us
Old friend, did we ever know why?

Now the gold of your locks has turned silver
My raven hair faded to grey
And I've travelled this road to your fireside
Old friend, will you turn me away?

Ragnhild Askillsdottir

Private Performances: Intimate Spaces and Invisible Kingdoms

Chapter Five : the Work of Creation - workshops, rehearsals & symposiums

...performance is not necessarily more meaningful than other events in one's life, but it is more deliberately so; a performance is, among other things, a deliberate effort to represent, to say something about something. (Peacock 1990: 208)

...in religious rituals the line between 'performative world' and 'ordinary mundane world' is fine or non-existent. (Myerhoff 1990:247)

It is not only through combat training, of course, that re-enactors and their physical world are created. Workshops and lectures teach skills ranging from weaving to sewing to leather working, from cooking and calligraphy to brewing to music-making. Topics include, not only history, and heraldry, but specialist subjects such as medieval medicine and herb lore and Viking navigation skills. The most basic of these workshops, prerequisite to any re-enactment, instruct members in making their own clothing, foot gear and armour.

Though I attended the training, planning, and workshop sessions of several groups, the ethnography which follows in this section was primarily drawn from regular meetings held by two Edinburgh-based groups. One of them held weekly craft workshops interspersed with topical lectures, and occasional meetings of their 'Scribes Guild' in order to write and publish a newsletter²⁹. The other group held weekly dance instruction and music practice, with occasional cooking get-togethers where recipes were tested before feasts. Both groups joined together for weekly combat training, sharing venues

²⁹ All of what I would term the 'privately-focussed' groups issue regular newsletters, often illustrated or illuminated, for their members, with information on upcoming events, humorous anecdotes, articles of interest, etc. This is, I believe, part of the work of creating a complete alternative 'non-mundane' world. Those groups who primarily engaged in public performance did not seem to feel the need to do this, but instead issued brief instructions or information on upcoming 'gigs', directions to venues, or minutes of annual meetings, by email.

and instructing duties, and members regularly attend each other's events and workshops, which are held in private homes, church halls, or university premises.



Figure 31 - illustration from a book of costumes of the 11th - 13th centuries, used by the re-enactors as a source of costume designs

Lectures may be on arcane academic subjects, but they are not staid affairs. There is much joking, particularly punning and ribald comments. Double entendres concerning 'sheathing swords' and 'polishing helmets' were frequent³⁰. The scene of many of these meetings was a room called 'The Keep', which served as both workshop and storage room, and whose walls were hung with posters of events, photos of members in 'garb', and a large appliqued banner bearing "The Arms of the Realm". This features a saltire - a white St. Andrew's cross diagonally across a field of light blue - with a golden cup superimposed on the centre of the cross. The heraldic description of this image, or

³⁰ Violent imagery was also common: see the chapter on humour for discussion of male-dominated and sexually-oriented joking.

‘device’ is: “*on a field azure, a saltare argent* ³¹, *overall a chalice*”. Thus the symbolism flags up the group’s ‘Scottishness’, while the cup brings to mind the medieval Arthurian romance of the Grail Quest, with its themes of mysticism and chivalry.

For more formal meetings, such as the nomination of new members or office-bearers, or for the shared meals following cooking workshops, those present may put on the costume, or ‘garb’, of their chosen period. For example, at one medieval dance practice, most of the dozen or so members present were ‘garbed’. Two women wore laced-front Tudor dresses, one in green, another pink, with slashed sleeves.



Figure 32 - garbing for the feast - note double tablet-weave belt

³¹ In heraldry there are no shades of colour: there is only ‘azure’, not light or dark blue; additionally the colours white and yellow represent, respectively, silver [*argent*] and gold [*or*].

Another woman wore a wine red velvet dress trimmed in “tablet weave³²” in the simple medieval t-design - the basic pattern for women’s dresses from the Iron Age until the 13th century, and even later among peasant women. Several of the women in medieval dress had their hair covered - tied up under wimples, as was the custom of the time, and in addition wore pouches and knives hanging from their woven belts. As there were no pockets or handbags at this time, women would carry items such as keys and money tied this way. It was common as well to bring one’s own cutlery to a feast. Among the men, dress ranged from a simple peasant in beige homespun hooded tunic to a medieval lord in a full-sleeved sweeping blue robe trimmed with gold braid, with a matching headdress. At other times, however, dress is informal and varied, and may range from concert t-shirts and combat boots to black lace-up goth corsets.

During one such informal meeting, Rhodri had been asked to speak about a topic of personal interest, and had chosen to talk about the evolution of domestic architecture in Britain from the 4th century Saxon period up to Tudor times. I found it quite interesting, but it was difficult to follow, or even hear, at times, due to the frequent interruptions and interjections. At one point, he mentioned the wages of medieval builders:

Rhodri: “Masons got 6 pence a day, wardens - the overseers - got 10 pounds a year.”

Gunnar (demonstrating his own detailed knowledge of social history): “That’s comparable to what archers got.”

Ieuan ap Arthur (the acknowledged group clown): “That must’ve been good wages - the Masons are doing pretty well now” (referring to Masonic lodge members).

Later Rhodri tried to sketch a typical Saxon pit house, which he had copied from a book, but Ragnhild objected that his illustration seemed to show the thatch of the roof extending all the way to the ground, which would have meant the rain would collect in the pit and flood the house. She insisted that “they would’ve had low walls with wide thatch eaves to aim the rain off!” It is typical of re-enactors that they often contest

³² Tablet weave is produced by lacing coloured yarns through holes in flat tablets made of wood or bone. The loose ends of the yarn are anchored, and then the tablets twisted and slid forward, like the shuttle on a modern loom, to knot the yarn into place. This technique was highly favoured by the Vikings, and later in Britain, to trim cloaks, dress hems and yokes, caps, etc.

conclusions of archaeologists and other academics as impractical. In another lecture, one member mentioned that the shield bosses recovered from the Saxon Sutton Hoo burial and on display in a museum were incorrectly placed, as if they would have supported an arm strap. The re-enactors insisted that this isn't a practical way to carry a centre-bossed shield, and that a shoulder strap would be more sensible.

At this point, Rhodri's talk broke into a free-for-all as a confused jumble of voices began to make comments on architecture and construction, one person mentioning pre-Roman Iron Age buildings, another traditional Scottish crofter's cottages - a cacophony of 'competing knowledge'. Ieuan then joked, "we've got Romans, Scottish Wars of Independence, and everything!" This scene illustrated a common feature of re-enactment groups, which are so democratic as to be occasionally anarchic. Although often competitive, what is being contested here is not so much constructions of masculinity, but possession of knowledge and rhetorical skill. Women group members also participate in this banter, though sometimes to a lesser extent depending on the group dynamic. Though such apparent 'chaos' seems to threaten the structure of the group, I argue that it serves to reinforce the egalitarian and anti-authoritarian attributes valued by the re-enactors.

When the noise died down, Rhodri recovered the floor, and explained that features of present-day homes, sometimes altered in function, derive from medieval forms: the entry hall of a modern British house is a shrunken version of the courtly great hall, but still a central focal point; the name 'pantry' stems from its function of storing bread, rather than tinned foods, whereas a 'buttery' originally stored 'butts of ale', not butter. It seemed he had successfully regained his listeners' rapt attention, until he showed a picture of a medieval great house with gargoyles along the roof. The joking immediately started up yet again:

Ieuan ap Arthur: "What happens when the gargoyle flies off?"

(Simultaneously) **Ragnhild:** "You have to sit up there!"

Gunnar: "You stop eating those funny mushrooms!"

Ieuan ap Arthur: "Or smoking that long cigarette your friend just rolled for you giggling madly."

(More seriously) **Ragnhild:** “Without the gargoyles the walls fall down.”

Gunnar: “The weight anchors the wall; without it the roof pushes the wall out.”

Once the flow of the lecture had been ‘breached’, other interruptions soon followed again. Rhodri was explaining the British practice of adding wings to the great hall: “they basically used them as overflow from their halls”, at which point someone pretended to have misheard the word ‘halls’ for ‘balls’, and stage-gasped “**What** did you say?!” Overflow from their what?!”. Others in the room laughed, while one girl put in, “**DON’T** even go there!” (Jerry Springer’s trademark phrase from a current American talk show popular at the time).

In addition to building techniques, Rhodri mentioned the tell-tale bodily deformities caused by various types of employment, noting that grinding slaves in early Saxon and Roman times had “large clawed hands and deformed wrist bones”. Here again, Gunnar added that the remains of archers found aboard the *Mary Rose* (a famous Tudor ship) had “fused shoulder blades from practicing with long bows since childhood. They needed very strong upper chest and arm muscles”. Ragnhild then mentioned that “seamstresses had worn teeth on one side of their mouths, and a cut groove in their lip” from their trade. These ‘interruptions’ served not so much to disrupt, but to add to the learning process, and also to allow listeners to participate and demonstrate their own knowledge of subject areas.

Finally, Rhodri began to talk about medieval farming and food, and mentioned the Goths and their diet: “they were stocky, and fierce warriors... they ate barley bread, root vegetables, and pork and wild game..” and there was a renewed series of interjections:

Ieuan ap Arthur “I know a lot of tall, thin Goths who are vegetarians... though they do go around wearing white face makeup and sucking blood...” (this said accompanied by sucking noises and ‘vampiric’ gestures - curled fingers on upraised hands)

Gunnar: “NOT like real Goths, then - they used axes, not their teeth!”

Ragnhild: “I know Jenny causes a lot of ‘accidents’ walking around in her corsetry.” (a play on the words ‘axe’/ ‘accident’ as well as a reference to the bloodshed attributed to the early Goths)

The young woman in question, whose persona name is 'Cassandra', is a modern-day British "goth", whose typical look is pale, badly-nourished and dressed all in black, with hair worn long and dyed black (or sometimes streaked with green, magenta or purple) or head partially shaved. Several of the younger re-enactors were also members of a "goth" group; 'Cassandra' was well-known around the city for her famous wasp-waisted black Victorian corsets, 10 inch waist, and long, close-fitting spider-web skirts, which often turned heads. At this point the group had gone off on a tangent again, taking advantage of Rhodri's mention of the historical Goths to joke about their friends and acquaintances who were modern-day 'goths', and who often cultivate a tough, blood-thirsty look while in fact being frail vegetarians, wearing makeup and vintage lingerie.

It is not only younger members who experience such interruptions: group members would interject, object, protest, or demonstrate their own knowledge, when senior group members were speaking as well. During Sir Niall's (usually known as 'Ecce') talk on brewing mead and ale, this occurred frequently. 'Ecce' had recommended adding "a tea cup full of cold tea" when making homemade honey mead. When several listeners expressed surprise and perplexity, he responded, feigning exasperation, "Look, it just works - if dancing widdershins³³ around the graveyard at night worked I'd do that."

A dialogue ensued regarding the relative merits of different types of yeast. Next the method of making methglin, a type of spiced mead, was explained, and then ale:

"Take barley - it has hairy ears - just take the grains, the rest is for peasants. That's what they eat on my estates! Amazing what they can do with barley ears and pigs' ears!"

Ecce was especially known for staying 'in persona' much of the time. His main personas include an Iron Age Celt, a 15th century Border Reiver, a Viking, and a 10th century lord from Strathclyde. It is this last persona which he was speaking from in the previous comment.

³³ 'Widdershins' = counterclockwise; this is a reference to pagan Wiccan ritual in which dancers move counterclockwise in a circle at the beginning of a ceremony to 'open' the pathway to the spiritual world.

On another occasion, Ecce mentioned that he was moving to a new flat, and that “I am commanding [Ieuan] to attend upon me” in order to help with this. ‘Ieuan’, as Ecce’s squire, was required to ‘do his knight’s bidding’, and this seemingly extends into such ‘mundane’ activities as moving furniture.

Finally Ecce described how he made home-brewed nettle beer, advising the use of heads of very young nettles, and heavy gloves to pick them. Ragnhild spoke up at this point, warning: “Don’t pick them by the roadside, because they’re sprayed with pesticides.” Ecce also mentioned that in Scotland heather and spruce had traditionally been used in place of hops to give added flavour to beer. This practice was banned after the Union of the Parliaments, because heather and spruce were free to local people, whereas hops had to be grown in warmer climes and therefore imported and taxed. Someone then mentioned that a newspaper article had said that the recent reintroduction of *Fraoich* (heather) ale was still technically illegal as the ban remained on the statute books to this day! When another person asked about making whisky, Ecce warned that “It’s illegal to heat distil in this country, unless you’re paying Inland Revenue - it’s also very dangerous.”

Gunnar then said “I prefer 2 parts mead to 1 part whisky - the mead cuts the nastiness of the whisky, the whisky cuts the sickliness of the mead”. He mentioned that on the back of the Moniac³⁴ mead bottle there is a recipe for mulled mead, which begins: “Take 6 bottles of mead and 1 bottle of whisky’ - I like that attitude!” Ecce then entertained us by pantomiming his own version of the recipe, pretending to pour something in his mouth, with head thrown back, he exclaimed “pour in bucket” - (pretending to belch) - “add spices” - pretending to munch on something - “shake” - jumping up and down.

In addition to clowning, punning and other forms of word play are a frequent feature of group interaction. On one occasion a group member mentioned the glut of home

³⁴ This is a brand highly favoured by re-enactors, I have noted.

improvement programmes on television recently, and Gunnar noted the British had move from religious building to a concern with purely secular construction: “It used to be monasteries, now it’s conservatories”. A book on medieval jewelry, with a cover photograph of ornate necklaces, rings, brooches, heavy chains and medallions, also sparked a round of jokes and puns:

Aldis: “That looks like the shield of Ankh-Morpork³⁵” (pointing to a heraldic shield device on one item).

Ecce: “It’s a nice collection. Barbarian hoards welcome.” (a play on the word ‘hordes’)

Gunnar: “Vikings would broach those lines” (a play on ‘brooch’, but here using ‘broach’ with its multiple meanings of ‘open up’ enemy lines, ‘reveal’ treasure).

Like the reference to Viking raiders, much of the humour enjoyed by re-enactors has a violent or combat-related component, though this may range from detailed tactics of historic battles to science fiction and fantasy characters. I was initially surprised by the interest in high technology, the internet, and futuristic topics, when I first came to know many re-enactors. Star Wars, for example, is a favourite re-enactors’ film, and I will never forget sitting in a candle-lit tent after a hard day “besieging” the walls of Caerlaverock Castle, passing around homemade ale in an ox horn drinking vessel, and listening to a serious debate on whether or not the hero Luke Skywalker had ‘gone over to the Dark Side’ by giving in to anger in his battle with his father. While setting up tables in the ‘Keep’ one evening, this conversation came back to mind when Ieuan noticed that the collapsing legs of the tables formed an X shape, and joked: “X-wing tables! Deploy arms!”

I was also often amazed at the chronological breadth of interests and detailed knowledge of topics ranging from medieval law to physics. On one occasion, during a discussion of modern warfare weapons, I was given a quick lesson in the principles of cold fusion, and the workings of rail guns, which utilize magnets. On another the discussion touched on the role of women and thralls (slaves) in Anglo-Saxon society. Though I had thought

³⁵ Ankh-Morpork is a fictional, pseudo-medieval city in the Diskworld novels of Terry Pratchett, who is much beloved among both re-enactors and British pagans.

that people who immersed themselves in history might romanticize the past, or hide from the future, I found that this was far from the truth.

Ceremonial Occasions

Privately-focussed groups, whether Viking, medieval or Covenanting period, tend to have highly elaborate rules and rituals. I will describe in the following section the annual meeting of one society to elect new office-bearers and introduce new, or re-declare existing, laws and edicts to the assembled members. Myerhoff has argued that

[o]ne of the intriguing questions of belief, absorption, conviction, and transformation involved in performance circles around the problem of secular and emergent rituals that do not cluster about a set of shared, powerful and axiomatic symbols. (1990:248)

Thus, within newly created cultures, the “invention of traditions” (Hobsbawn 1983, 1991) as well as “definitional ceremonies” (Myerhoff 1975:22) are essential to establishing a group identity.

On the day of the meeting, the current Master of Arms fulfilled his ceremonial function by guarding the doorway to the Keep. He was wearing a brocaded doublet and hose in his heraldic colours of blue and silver, and a plumed Tudor hat. Blocking the way with his sword, he declared, “None shall pass!” After identifying us however, he smiled and let us in. Inside, several of the assembled members were wearing garb of different periods - some women wore wimples, while one had a steepled hat with trailing veil; one man had a Viking tunic with a cloak decorated with elaborate woollen embroidery.

The main order of business was to choose, from among the ‘Populace’ (the term used for members of the society, or ‘Realm’), new officers, and to nominate others for awards or guild membership. The chief office to be filled was that of ‘Lord’ or ‘Lady’ Albion³⁶, head of the Realm. ‘Albion’ also bore the following titles:

³⁶ ‘Albion’, I was told, was the ancient name for Scotland, though it is sometimes used to refer to all of the isle of Britain. One member told me it came from the Gaelic word ‘Alba’ [pronounced ‘alapa’], or Scotland; another that it referred to the snowy white mountains of the Highlands.

Suzerain of the North, Keeper of the Chalice, and Defender of the One True Faith.³⁷

An Exchequer and Clerk (or treasurer and secretary in modern parlance) were also to be chosen. In addition, other voluntary Councillors might include Archivist, who maintains the library; Illuminator, to publish the group's newsletter and produce calligraphic scrolls with official decrees and awards; Keeper of the Wardrobe, to maintain and expand the group's costumes; Master at Arms, to train members in combat; Dance master or mistress, to instruct members in dancing; Minister of Arts and Sciences, to plan talks and workshops; Champion of the Realm, chosen by prowess in armed combat; Historian to keep records of the society; Herald to make official announcements at feasts and tournaments, and Bard to recite or sing.

While all members of the "Populace" may use the heraldic device of the Realm, the Councillors listed above are "entitled to use the device of the society differenced by:

Albion, a crown
Clerk, a quill
Exchequer, a key (in addition the symbol of office shall be a wooden chest known as the Chest of Monies)
Illuminator, a sun in its splendour
Archivist, a scroll
Keeper of the Wardrobe, a pair of shears
Minister of Arts and Sciences, an owl
Master at Arms, a sword
Former Councillors shall be entitled to use the device of their office differenced by a bordure or...³⁸

The device of the Champion of the Realm shall be:
on a field argent, a pale sable, a palette or, overall between three feathers a coney proper courant and regardant en arriere.³⁹

³⁷ Article xxv of the Customs of the Realm declares that "The One True Faith decrees that the only correct manner of eating jelly bears shall be to bite off the heads first, and any member of the Populace caught eating jelly bears in any other way shall be discommunicated (and knee-capped)."

³⁸ i.e., by a gold border. From the Norman French, gold is *or*, silver *argent*, red *gules*, blue *azure*, green *vert*, and purple *purpure*.

³⁹ i.e., "a black vertical bar against a silver shield with a golden plate between 3 silver feathers, on top of which a rabbit in its natural colours running away and looking back over its shoulder".

The other chief rule regarding titles within the group is that:

No title commonly used by any member of the Populace shall be recognised at Court save those which have been granted at Court or by other recognised Realms. (Customs of the Realm xx)

This means, the Minister of Arts and Sciences told me, that

unlike the SCA, you can't give yourself titles such as Baron or Lord, and your character can't be somebody famous⁴⁰ and you should feasibly have lived in Europe between approximately 600 and 1600.

"Members of the Populace", who are also sometimes addressed as "Loyal Subjects", may themselves bring forward proposals at this point. One recent proposition was to declare:

The wearing of yellow tights shall be an offence punishable by death for the good of the realm.

This was amended by those who felt this response might be excessive to:

The wearing of yellow tights shall be a punishable offence, the penalty for which being:
a) the wearer shall be pelted with bread rolls
b) the wearer shall suffer the indignity of having to wear yellow tights.

It was agreed in the end that the latter would be sufficient humiliation. The anarchic / anti-authoritarian nature of many groups leads to the use of humour which often seems to subvert their own status. Although commentary such as that above seems to 'mock' the group's practices, it also serves to diffuse external criticism. It projects the message that "this is play - we do know this isn't real".

During the course of the meeting, concern was expressed about the need to increase membership, as it was becoming difficult to fill all the ranks and offices. This is a

The humorous imagery of a cowardly rabbit as the arms of the Champion is typical of many re-enactors, who eschew taking themselves too seriously.

⁴⁰ Public performing groups, on the other hand, do take on roles of famous people related to the event they are portraying on the day, but relinquish the identity after the performance.

serious issue faced by all re-enactment groups, who may lose members who move away, fall out with other group members, or 'marry out' - i.e., marry a non-re-enactor, who may not be tolerant of the demands of time and money of their spouse's pastime.

Typically, however, this soon led to more joking:

Mistress of the Wardrobe: "Well, if we need to make up our numbers, Ieuan could have a split personality".

Champion of the Realm (swinging his sword): "Up, down, or sideways?"

After the selection of new Councillors was concluded, the discussion moved on to planning the next Feast and Crusade. Suggestions for a theme, and entertainments, were sought. Ieuan remarked that: "As it's a Spring feast, I'd like to burn the Dawn Duellists in a Wicker Man".⁴¹

More serious suggestions included wearing fresh greens, fortune telling with rune stones, leaping over a bonfire, and making 'subtleties' (medieval marzipan sweets) in fertility symbols.⁴²

Next a member declared that "we need a pretext for a Crusade! - what do you think? Slay the Infidel? A dragon hunt?" A 'crusade' is a typical social event equivalent to a pub-crawl. 'Re-enactor-friendly' drinking establishments are chosen - ones which will allow visits 'in gear', or 'garb', and possibly wearing swords. Certain favourite haunts are felt to be 'safe' territory, where re-enactors can drink in relative peace and quiet without being challenged. One knight suggested "the Crusader's path to Holyrood", though referring not to a quest for a fragment of the True Cross, but rather a local pub frequented by nationalists and folk musicians as well as re-enactors.

⁴¹ The Dawn Duellists are another rival group much despised by the Realm of Albion, who consider them to lack authenticity and have overblown pretensions to fighting prowess. Sacrifices of enemies by burning them in a wicker cage were said by Julius Caesar to be practiced in ancient Britain.

⁴² Several of these activities, like burning a wicker man, are pagan practices. Many re-enactors I met were either practicing pagans, or wore pagan symbols, such as runes or symbols of Norse gods like the Thor's hammer. This seems part of an encompassing post-modern interest in pre-modern beliefs.

The eventual theme agreed upon was “A Divinely Inspired Goose”. One member was chosen to be the ‘goose’, using a goose puppet on marionette strings to hop along the pavement and lead the way, in the manner of a ‘hare and hounds’ hunt. This is a reference to an actual historic event in which a goose was believed to be possessed of a divine spirit. It was followed by a huge group of peasants, who abandoned their homes and entire villages and set off across Europe on a Crusade to the Holy Land. It was an example, I believe, of the rather arcane knowledge re-enactors have of the past, but also the humorous ends to which this knowledge is put.

Finally, Sir Niall stood up to ask formally whether it was “permissible within the laws of the Realm” to change his coat of arms. This featured the head of a white unicorn, ‘couped’, or cut with a straight edge (an animal head with a jagged edge along the neckline is termed ‘erased’) and facing to the viewer’s left - i.e., to the ‘right’⁴³ - above an open white rose. He expressed a wish to alter these arms by the addition of a border surrounding a “Scarlet Wyrn” (or red dragon) in the 1st quarter of the shield, to indicate his newly achieved membership in this order of warriors of recognised rank (more about the various guilds or orders will follow in the next section).

However, he was told that only the Head of the Order, who bears the title Constable of Dunedin, and generally also holds the office of Master of Arms, was allowed to include this symbol in their arms. Thus, the full coat of arms of someone who held these titles would be the Arms of the Realm - the gold chalice against a white saltire cross against a blue ground - “differenced” (i.e., rendered distinctive from the ordinary) by a sword, placed horizontally at the top of the shield, and a red dragon at the base of the shield.

⁴³ On coats of arms, the directional terms ‘sinister’ (left) and ‘dexter’ (right) are reversed because they refer to the position of the design on the shield as held by the knight in combat, i.e., his right or left. When a shield is divided into quarters, the dominant position is at the top left hand; the next in importance is the bottom right. This prominence is due to their visibility when being held in combat. Interestingly, the English version of the arms representing the United Kingdom show the 3 leopards in the 1st and 3rd quarters, with the Scottish lion rampant in the 2nd, and the Welsh dragon in the bottom 4th quarter, while the Scottish version of these arms displays the lion rampant in the key quarters, with the English leopards to the upper right and Welsh dragon once more bottom left.

The use of the heraldic term 'differenced' is interesting here, as members of The Realm use their arms to differentiate themselves not only from the 'mundane' population but also from other re-enactors. It first of all distinguishes members from other groups of the same type - 'subjects' of other 'realms' who will possess their own coats of arms. It also marks the frontier between what I have termed 'private practitioners' and public performance groups, which generally lack their elaborate ritual and symbols. Such boundaries are not impermeable, however. Although most re-enactors tend to belong to either one type or the other, individuals, or even groups themselves, may choose to 'cross over' the public / private divide.

Other members of the Order of the Realm were entitled to wear a badge of membership elsewhere - for example, on their surcoat or tunic - but not include it in their coat of arms. The significance of the sword is seen more fully in the fact that only the Master of Arms, and the Champion of the Realm, are allowed to bear arms at Court or in the presence of Lord or Lady Albion at a feast or tournament (Article xxiii, 'Customs of the Realm'). Other 'knights' must have their weapons 'peace-bonded' - i.e., rendered not easily accessible, as for example by tying the sword into its sheath.

Despite the formality of the application to grant a change of arms, and its subsequent and disappointing denial, the talk soon took a humorous turn again. Someone joked that as Sir Niall's arms featured a white rose, perhaps he could place a red worm, rather than a wyrm (an ancient term for a dragon) on the white rose. However, he announced with fervour that he was changing the colour of this device from a white rose to a red rose "in honour of my lady Fiona". He had decided to become "a Lancastrian rather than a Yorkist", and planned to show his new allegiance to the House of Lancaster, with whom his girlfriend's 'persona' was affiliated. He further justified this switch by informing us that the city of York still had an ancient law on its statute books declaring that "all Scotsmen are to be driven from the city upon pain of death", and thus as a Scot he 'no longer felt able to ally himself to York'. I believe this is an interesting example of what Herzfeld termed "semiotic bricolage", constructing identity out of material salvaged from the past (1997:24) and combining it with present-day concerns (in this case

simultaneously foregrounding his Scottishness with politically nationalist comments about the inferiority of English law, and yet demonstrating his commitment to his girlfriend who was from Lancashire).

Domestic Interiors: the past for private consumption

Though some private events occur in public spaces such as parks, church basements or university student halls, many take place in intimate arenas. An example of these are small gatherings organised to work on costumes, or to try out and share recipes from different periods by holding a formal meal. One such domestic event was a 'Shire meet'⁴⁴ which took place in the autumn of 1999 in the flat of a married couple who used the personas of Lord Andrew and Lady Anne Montgomerie (among others). Founding members of 'The Realm of Albion', as well as of the SCA, they recreated periods ranging from the 9th to the 18th centuries.

The hostess invited several of us to see her collection of various period costumes to seek ideas for our own projects. The term 'costume', like the term 'character', is almost never used by re-enactors, who prefer the expressions 'wear' (used in noun rather than verb form), 'garb', 'dress', or 'gear' or 'kit' if referring to military clothing and armour. In addition they also use 'persona' to refer to the adopted fictive characters which they create to suit different historical periods. These persona have biographies of their own, which grow over time and often reflect real events in the re-enactors' lives, such as marriage, childbirth, or moving to a new region. 'Lady Anne' and 'Sir Andrew'⁴⁵, for example, had wide-ranging interests and personas to match: Byzantine, Viking, and 12th century Scottish, for example. She and her husband had married "in period" in 18th century clothing, and female guests had come in mob caps with typical full overskirts split in front over contrasting underskirt, laced bodices and full lace sleeves falling away from just above the elbow. Some men had sported tri-corner hats and braided

⁴⁴ 'Shire' is an administrative term used by the internationally-based group SCA; it roughly corresponds with modern districts or counties.

⁴⁵ He might at different 'times' be known as Sir Raymond Fitzdrogo, as 'Oleg', or as 'Stephan Locagos'.

The other guests present were working on making shirts, or *braes* (a man's undergarment worn throughout the medieval period. Basically like large boxer shorts, *braes* are worn under a tunic and have ties to which woollen leggings, tubes of material like tight trouser legs, are fastened). We had gathered to work on sewing new 'kit' for the upcoming Beowulf feast. I happened to be making an underdress, so decided to tackle a *hangarok* as my next project, as both Viking and early Anglo-Saxon 'wear' was considered appropriate for the event. I had expressed concern to Ragnhild about not having the appropriate wardrobe for the feast, but she had reassured me:

It's Dark Age, you can manage... you know Beowulf? About 800. We'll be doing a couple of the tableaux from it. Three courses or four. I'm playing the misunderstood heroine, Grendel's Mother. (In falsetto voice): All this stuff about eating people, you know?! Only got the Geat's word for it! (laughing)

(Note: Gaet is the ancient term for Swedes, the area from which Beowulf had travelled to aid Hrothgar, king of the Danes.)

Having seen the beautifully made Viking dress inspired another conversation on the favorite topic of re-enactors - authenticity. One of the newest members said to me, (out of the hostess' hearing) that she understood that Viking people only put braid such as tablet weave on the front of a garment, and didn't bother to trim the back. She said she knew this because this practice had been revealed through grave finds. I felt that this revealed an inherent danger in relying solely on material artefacts in order to define a culture, and so I remarked that one might make a comparison with modern burials in which only a shirtfront and suit coat (without trousers) were sometimes put on a dead man's body in the coffin. This practice has been used in parts of the United States in order to save money, and because only the upper portion of the body could be seen when the hinged upper lid of the casket was raised during the 'viewing' prior to the funeral. If the Vikings were in fact following a similar custom, then a re-enactors' insistence on 'authenticity' and putting decorative trim only on the front of a garment might in fact look like they were wearing stolen grave goods! It is just such inconclusive archeological evidence, in combination with an emphasis on practice and practicality, that leads to disagreement and debate among re-enactors.

Two of the newest members of the group, both young women, were being helped with their costumes for the feast. Many of the others present were older established members, most of them married. One of these couples, 'Otto' and 'Caitlin', arrived, musical instruments in tow: a harp, a lute, and a medieval fiddle. Next, 'Arinbjorn' and 'Ymma' arrived with their young son, Gregori. This couple were sponsoring the upcoming feast, and so assumed the title of 'autocrat' (SCA terminology which essentially means 'event organiser'). A big boy of about two or three years old, Gregori was dressed in a blue medieval A-shaped tunic, very nicely made, with tablet-woven braiding at the neck, which it turned out matched that which his father wore for the later communal meal. Both father and son also had on beautifully handmade medieval shoes of soft leather, the little boy's finely detailed despite their tiny size.

Recipes appropriate for the Beowulf feast were discussed, keeping in mind that foods such as vegetables from the New World were unheard of at that time, and spices from the East were unavailable to a large extent. As refined cane sugar was also non-existent in the British Isles and Scandinavian countries during this period, it was decided that I would attempt a dish made of carrots boiled with barley and sweetened with honey. Re-enactors go to great lengths to research and try out dishes appropriate to the period and area they recreate. Although Goody (1982:136) notes that the first cookbook in English was published by the Augustinian Alexander Neckham in the 12th century, re-enactors attempt to reconstruct the diet of earlier times by poring over contemporary accounts of food practices in historical works.

Except for the small boy, during the first part of the afternoon people wore their 'mundanes' or street clothes, as they worked on their sewing, leather working and cooking, and chatted, gossiped, and gave advice. Some moved back and forth from the sitting room to the kitchen to check on bubbling pots, and two sewing machines were chugging away, adding to the noise. I remarked to one of the other women that a re-enactor I'd met in the Borders insisted that every bit of 'garb' must be hand-stitched for authenticity. She replied that "if a medieval woman had had a sewing machine, she would've used it!" Despite this group's emphasis on authentic detail, re-enactors such as

the one I encountered in the Borders are sometimes considered fanatics, or 'authentic-nuts', by others. This local group did not reject the advantages of modern machines in aiding them to "re-create" the past. I had been invited to the gathering by email.

It is a common misconception - and certainly one which I laboured under myself prior to entering fieldwork - that many re-enactors are unreformed Luddites who reject the modern advances of the 20th and 21st centuries. In fact, many keen re-enactors could happily explain to me the intricacies of protein crystallography and cold fusion energy as easily as, say, advances in 8th century blacksmith techniques. Although I have met re-enactors who do not have a car, a telephone, or a television, in many cases this was more a matter of financial priorities than an ideological stance. To participate fully in the world of re-enactment requires a large commitment of resources, whether of money required to purchase finished objects or raw materials, or of time needed to gather, produce and work those materials to create the physical items needed to 'enter' the past.

When the recipes we had decided to 'audition' for the feast were finally prepared, conversation ceased, and within a short space of time both the room and the people in it were transformed. The room was rearranged and redecorated - the central area cleared by pushing back the sofa; the table set against the window and covered with rough clay jugs and pewter trays. The sewing machines were closed up and put away, candles lit and the overhead electric lights switched off. Large swaths of fine velvet cloth were brought out and draped over anachronistic items of furniture such as the piano - all the modern-looking fittings of the room. The present century was banished.

While this was happening, individuals had been disappearing into another room to change into their garb. One man wore early Renaissance doublet and hose, of the type that might be seen in illustrations of Columbus from the late 15th century; 'Arinbjorn' and his son wore earlier medieval peasant tunics over fitted hose and leather shoes. Ymma, his wife, in contrast, wore a lady's dress of the 11th or 12th century - a green surcoat, a smock-like overdress with wide armholes extending below the hip, revealing the ornate printed fabric of the red underdress. She also wore a wimple which wrapped

around the throat and was pinned in place, and above this a starched veil, stiff, angular and architectural in style, which framed the head. At her waist, her household keys were tied on a belt to indicate her status as a housewife. This practice was drawn from historical sources:

... women of the Thuringians, Anglo-Saxons and Franks, among others, wore a key or key-like object hanging from their belts as a sign of free, married status... as symbols of the right of the women of the house to control the door, storeroom or chest of valuables. (Ellis 1996:28)

Our hostess 'Lady Anne' also wore her householder's keys tied at her waist, but she was dressed in a peach and white brocaded Tudor dress, its slashed sleeves revealing the fine white fabric of the undersleeves, and with a starched gabled headdress. 'Caitlin' wore a sage green skirt with a fitted brocade bodice in rust and green, of a style popular in the mid-17th century, and her hair was wrapped into a headscarf in a turban-like style. One of the new women, 'Regina', had borrowed a Tudor dress in deep burgundy worn over a white chemise. It had a fitted and laced-up bodice and separate sleeve sections covering the forearm, with smaller tubular sections covering the upper arm. Both sections were laced together with black cording, as was the bodice, and the sleeve sections were also decorated with the same black cord laced back and forth in a diamond pattern - all beautifully made.

It was not only the women who took such care with their garments. Historical accounts reveal that men were often as beautifully turned out in pre-modern times as women:

Celtic men were certainly vain about their appearance... they [wore] 'striking' clothes with various dazzling pieces of jewellery...

Moreover, both the men and women bathed, wore makeup and kept their hair long:

The Romans thought the Celts unduly vain about their hair. (Ellis 1996: 172-176)

The practice of wearing flowing hair, and beards for men, was followed by most of the re-enactors I met, although in general both sexes avoided makeup. Among the men, in addition to Viking and peasant garb, some sported late 15th-century oversized smocked

shirts over woollen hose, an advance over the earlier braes in that they were sewn together and featured a codpiece-like triangular panel at the front which could be dropped or laced shut (the forerunner to the modern fly zipper). Eicher & Roach-Higgins have defined the dressed person as ““a *gestalt* that includes body, all direct modifications of the body itself, and all three-dimensional supplements added to it... focus[ing] on the concrete reality of dress that has describable properties, such as color, shape, texture, surface design or odor... [and including] skin coloring, perfumes and hairdress” (1993:13). Among private practitioners, activities such as dance or combat practice, or sharing a communal meal, are rendered distinctive through the donning of specialized clothing. The avoidance of makeup or commercially prepared perfumes, and the covering of hair with hats or veils, were also typical features. Barnes & Eicher note that dress establishes a person’s identity both ‘geographically and historically’ and as a member of a specific community (1993:1). Moreover, it has an impact not only on the viewer, the recipient of the visual message, but on the wearer, who receives in addition other sensory stimuli: “The sensual effect of certain textures on the skin may be experienced as either positive or negative. Certain textile designs may delight or displease the person wearing them.” (1993:3). To these examples, I would add the weight of a fabric, its warmth, or coolness, odor, the sound it makes, and the extent to which it restricts or allows movement. All of these factors contribute to the transformative effect of donning ‘garb’ - clothing the body in order to ‘clothe’ the mind for the past. Just as for the people of the Middle Ages who they attempt to emulate, “[c]eremony transformed the simple, daily acts of eating and drinking into high theater. Everyone shared an ingrained sense of occasion” (Henisch 1979:212).

In addition to their clothing, guests had brought musical instruments, and ‘feast gear’ - in other words, ‘period’ vessels and eating utensils made of horn, wood, pottery, or pewter. Someone lent me a wooden bowl and horn spoon because I had forgotten to bring my own. Re-enactors follow the medieval practice of expecting guests to provide their own cutlery - at least, a knife and spoon, as “the fork was conspicuous by its absence in the Middle Ages” (Henisch 1976:284). In her studies on the role of feasting in medieval society, Henisch notes that:

The veteran of many dinner parties never left his spoon in a dish, for fear it would be carried off to the kitchen. Instead he retrieved it, wiped it carefully on his bread, and waited hopefully for the next course" (1976:183).

She goes on to describe the typical materials out of which spoons might be made, in particular, wood, metal, or horn. Henisch cites a medieval writer who advocated horn spoons as his favorite:

being neither so churlish in weight as metall...
nor yet so soiling in use ne rough to the lips as
wood is, but lyght plyaunt and smooth, that with
a little licking will always be kept as clean as a dy' (ibid).

I can attest that horn is much more pleasant to the mouth than either wood or cold metal! After the transformation of room and diners, the food was brought out. There was a type of spinach pie cooked in butter and spices - including cinnamon - and a fish paste made of boiled and flaked whitefish cooked with barley and breadcrumbs until it was the consistency of pate. This was then mixed with red wine and served cold.

Red wine was served, and though the usual practice would be to pour this into a pottery pitcher for serving, on this evening the modern glass (machine-manufactured) bottle of wine had been set directly onto the table. No one had at first seemed to notice this, but eventually it caused a minor incident - an example of the ongoing conflict over levels of accuracy and authenticity which is an ever-present aspect of re-enactment life. One of the men had finished the wine, pouring the last of it into his goblet, and returning the bottle to the table. At this point, one of the strict purists in the group suddenly noticed the offending anachronistic object, and, affronted, he took objection and admonished the drinker, "Would you please remove that bottle". The supposed culprit at this point was taken aback and argued that he hadn't set the bottle there originally, he'd just lifted it to fill his glass and returned it to the place it had been sitting all evening. But to the objector, whatever the reason for its presence, the modern object was inappropriate to the atmosphere of the event and spoiling the mood, and he swiftly removed it from the

table and hid it out of sight. This 'compulsion for precision' hints at the true nature of these gatherings:

Ritual places people in contact with reality - with divine potency.
Hence the moments of danger from which only the consecrated
and those who know precisely what to do are protected.
(Tuan 1990:242)

After this altercation was smoothed over, instruments were brought out, and the evening finished with music. Several of those present were talented musicians. 'Wolfgang' had brought his harp, 'Caitlin' her harp and a lute, and 'Otto' a type of medieval instrument resembling a violin that produced a droning sound. 'Arinbjorn' meanwhile kept the beat on a tabour drum. With the candles flickering, the smell of melting wax, and modern items hidden away or disguised, the music acted to create a feeling of 'sanctuary' from the outside world. The harmony of stringed instruments and voice seemed to soothe away the earlier disagreement, creating a social harmony among the participants. Although I had hoped to be able to photograph the guests in their feast 'garb', after the earlier breach I did not dare to risk another anachronistic intrusion.

Through such meetings, 'private performances' in which strict rituals are adhered to, knowledge passed on, camaraderie built and rifts healed, in which communal meals are prepared and shared using specialised utensils, and music features as both bond and celebration, a collective invocation is enacted: "Let us believe".



Figure 34 - a minstrel with horn instrument

Music and dance

Many re-enactors devote as much time and energy into recreating music, dance, clothing, shoes and adornments, food and drink, as into the battle re-enactments for which they are best known to the general public. Researching dance and music is made particularly difficult by the fact that no choreographies exist prior to the 15th century, and no known dance steps at all prior to 1200. The earliest-known English source is John Playford's *The English Dancing Master* published in 1651, but manuscripts describing courtly dance are found in Italy and Northern Europe as early as the 1400s.

Keen students must therefore be able to read French, German or Italian, either in modern translations or in their original early texts. Even these sources often limit themselves to simply naming the steps, or giving the theory behind the various dances.



Figure 35 - musicians gather in Haddington Hall

In order to reconstruct earlier dances, enthusiasts use a combination of musical texts and illustrations of dancers in tapestries and manuscripts, along with descriptions in written texts such as romantic poetry. What are practiced as ‘medieval’ dance steps, therefore, are actually reconstructions of the late 20th century, and reliable instructions are not available until the Cromwellian period. However, re-enactors argue that courtly dances were often based on much earlier ‘peasant’ or folk styles, and so feel justified in performing 15th century dances in earlier historical contexts.

There is no evidence of dancing in ‘couples’ until after the 1300s. Typical of the folk dances is the ‘bransle’, which is performed in a circle with dancers chaining hands. Variations include ‘Pease’ bransle, in which men and women alternately hop to left and right, or ‘Horses’ bransle, in which dancers ‘paw’ the ground with their foot. More formal dances of later periods include slow stately processionals, less lively than the folk

styles, in which couples intersperse measured strides with bows, 'riverentia' (a flourish with the toe), and with the one hand raised to clasp the partner's and the other arm extended, in a manner which feels calculated to display long sleeves and elegant clothes.

The effect of clothing on movement has been explored by Keali'inohomoku, who describes her efforts to study Japanese dance in Hawaii in a class in which the students were Caucasians unaccustomed to wearing kimono. They found themselves unaccountably unable to reproduce the bodily forms and movements demonstrated by their Japanese teacher no matter how diligent their efforts - until they learned to don and fit kimono appropriate to their body size. Properly worn, the kimono restricted the legs and covered the arms and hands entirely, allowing the students to reproduce the movements and gestures performed by their instructors (1979:77-78). For her own part, Keali'inohomoku taught Restoration dance, and had asked her own students to imagine they wore the wide-panniered skirts of that period on which to rest their arms and achieve a "rounded, poised" line to their arms (ibid:78).

Similarly, my own experience with certain late medieval dances was that they simply 'felt' wrong done in modern clothing; court dances requiring an extended arm and stately processional steps in which the feet are slowly moved forward and then brought together seem designed to display and sweep elaborate robes and skirts. In Korean court dances as well, modern practitioners use 'practice' sleeves in rehearsals to accustom them "kinetically to the fabric weight and length" (Keali'inohomoku 1979:78), as they use wrist gestures to suspend the sleeves so that they neither contact the floor nor the wearer's headdress, a crown which the dancer must be able to fling the sleeve over without catching it during performance. Keali'inohomoku demonstrates that Burmese dancers in barkcloth dresses and Spanish flamenco performers both interact with their costumes in particular ways, and the dress of Pueblo women dancers and Arabian belly dancers alike allows or constricts certain types of movement (ibid:78-79). She also contrasts the footwear of Scottish Highland dancers with Irish clog dancers, noting the differences in performance made possible in these styles due to the materials used in shoe construction - supple leather versus wood.

Particular types of clothing, therefore, do more than express gender, ethnicity, and status; they also determine bodily movement: “dance makers are choreographing costumes made animate” (Keali’inohomouku 1979:80). Just as clothing shapes motor behaviour, it also reflects culturally desirable forms of movement, particularly for the sexes, affecting walking and sitting, and beyond such everyday norms, often requires idealized forms of movement indicating cultural values - of delicacy, strength, egalitarianism, or spiritual exhaltation (ibid:82-83). The interaction of clothing style and bodily movement found in the recreation of period dances is a vivid example of the embodied experience of the past sought by re-enactors.



Figure 36 - from a book of medieval costumes used by re-enactors; note the trailing sleeves for both men and women

One Edinburgh re-enactment group, in addition to fight practice, costuming workshops, and small intimate dinners, holds regular weekly dance practices, which culminate in

occasional day- long events throughout the year. Themes might include 'The Spanish Court of King Alphonso X' and feature Moorish (Arab-influenced) food, or 'The Byzantine Empire' and feature food similar to Grecian or Turkish dishes. One such event I attended was the "Shire of Harpelstane"⁴⁶ Arts Symposium on the Nine Muses", and featured French troubadour songs, love poetry, epic poetry, history, tragedy, comedy, astronomy, music and dance.



Figure 37 - a medieval consort

The event was held in the home of the 'autocrats', or organisers, a beautifully renovated townhouse with soaring ceilings, polished wooden inlaid floors and floor to ceiling windows. A half suit of armour stood on a stand in a hall - but unlike those in stately baronial homes, it was neither ancient nor decorative, but frequently used by the owner in his persona of 'Otto von Groz'.

⁴⁶ This 'shire' corresponds roughly to the Midlothian region of Scotland.



Figure 38 - Plate armour of Otto von Groz of Haddington Hall

The prints on the walls were all taken from medieval manuscripts. The large ‘hall’ set aside for music had a long rack along one wall, supporting a variety of stringed instruments of various periods and origins: lutes, mandolins, bazoukis, a medieval fiddle, and others of Near Eastern origin. Many were set with wooden marquetry inlay or filigreed ivory insets. Next to this rack a large bookcase held percussion instruments: a pottery drum, tambourines, bodrans, castanets, and finger cymbals.



Figure 39 - an impressive collection of period instruments

Against the opposite wall stood a huge cast iron stove on a tiled hearth, surrounded by vessels, caskets, and implements of various periods. On all three walls surrounding the wall of instruments, wrought-iron candle sconces held large candles. A large carved wooden chest stood in one corner, and a rose-coloured tapestry was thrown over a wooden bench on which rested two harps. In front of one of the long windows, a dulcimer lay on the floor, and next to it a 'symphonia', or medieval hurdy-gurdy, was perched on a stool. The doors in the flat were labelled in medieval calligraphic style, 'Privy' (for the WC), 'Washing room' (for the bathroom), 'Music' on the large room hung with instruments, and 'Poetry' on the sitting room next to it, full of large sofas and padded ottomans.

In addition a large walk-in closet off of the bedroom had an array of costumes of various sizes and periods, with more laid out on the bed for guests who needed to borrow them. Those who attend such events regularly know that they must bring 'feast gear' (their own eating utensils in 'historic' styles and materials) and 'garb', but extras are always

made available for those new to re-enactment. No one participates in 'mundane' clothing, and I was given a long full skirt to wear with an embroidered velvet tunic, and told this 'will pass as Byzantine'. Another guest meanwhile was given a long blue tunic belted with silver chainmail. Some time was spent in ensuring that everyone present was garbed in their chosen historical period. As Roach & Eicher have noted,

Adornment... may serve as a means for symbolically tying a community together. Agreement on bodily adornment reinforces common consciousness and a common course of action that holds people together in a closely knit group. (1979:18)

'Lady Anne', who had been our hostess for the costuming and cooking gathering, was there in a pale green medieval dress and full white wimple covering her head, neck and the sides of her face. 'Lady Sarah', whom I'd met during dancing practice, wore a pale beige brocaded medieval dress with trailing wide sleeves; 'Morgana' wore a similar one of deep blue trimmed in gold braid. Another lady wore a dark green dress of late medieval style and her hair in a lace snood, or net; her husband wore Renaissance doublet with muttonleg sleeves over tight leggings, and a tall brimless green cap. They were accompanied by his mother, who had travelled from the United States to visit them, and who was attired in a pale blue-gray medieval dress.

Others who travelled regularly from Stirling to attend the weekly dance sessions were also there. In all there were some 24 participants, many of whom had travelled a great distance to attend the event. There were English guests from Norfolk and Nottingham, two Americans who were living in Wales, two Australians, and others from Glasgow and Stirling. Some chose to join in the music, song, and dance practice in the 'Music' room, while others adjourned to the adjoining room to read poetry, tragedies, and comedies.

The event commenced at 11:00 in the morning, and I spent the day learning to play the harp, as well as new dance steps, and singing 12th century French 'caroles', - which had nothing to do with Christmas, but were popular rounds sung by non-professionals and

used to accompany dances by those who couldn't afford to pay musicians. These examples of 'low' or folk art were later taken up at the court, but the original versions were intended for outdoor performance, so were, as our dance mistress said, "loud and perky - gie it a bit a wellie!"⁴⁷ Interestingly, most existing historic records of carols are church edicts in which the clergy attempted to ban dancing and singing as either pagan or immoral.⁴⁸

At about 8:00 in the evening, the music hall was cleared to prepare for the feast. Tables were brought in and covered with white cloths. I was asked to light all the candles in the wall sconces, as well as those in the other rooms, and the entire house was lit only by candlelight. 'Feast gear' was set upon the tables, including a beautiful green-glazed pitcher in the shape of a whimsical ram, and tankards in the shape of squat, sharp-nosed men. I remarked on these unusual objects, and was told by 'Lady Anne' that they had been wedding presents. Many of the married re-enactors I met had not only held their ceremony in historic dress, but had requested 'period' objects on their wedding gift lists: drinking horns, swords, pewter, pottery jugs, and bronze and amber jewelry, were some of the items received. Although the green-glazed ware looked remarkably modern to me, she explained that they had been made by a man in Norfolk who specializes in exact reproductions of museum pieces. Later, she told me, while watching an episode of the popular archaeological series *Time Team*, she was thrilled to see a fragment of pottery unearthed which had a face identical to the one on her tankards! It was clear that, aside from their beauty and craftsmanship, this experience had increased the value of the objects to her. In subsequent feasts I attended, I noticed that she and her husband always brought these items, which assumed pride of place and delineated their seats at the long feast tables.

⁴⁷ Scots expression meaning roughly 'give it all you've got'.

⁴⁸ One interesting Scots legend tells of a priest who cursed his village for dancing carols on Christmas eve instead of going to church - they were, according to different versions, either cursed to dance forever, or changed into a ring of standing stones.

The event was an interesting insight into the ethos of this group, and the ways in which it contrasted with the other private and public performing re-enactment societies I had met. One noticeable difference was the group's use of using specialised language and forms of address. Clothing, for example, was always referred to as 'garb', never as a costume. Both strangers and close relations are referred to by formal titles⁴⁹. The woman who sat opposite me at the feast table addressed both her own husband, and other men present, as "my lord": "Pray pass the wine, my lord". After the feast many of those assembled joined in the entertainment. 'Sir Adolphus' had risen to sing, when his Renaissance bonnet, which featured a long ostrich-plume that had repeatedly brushed against our faces during the dances, almost came to harm when the feather came dangerously close to the burning candle in the wall sconce. In some alarm, 'Lady Amadale' called out: "My lord, beware of the candle which burns behind you!" Meanwhile, 'Lord Kenneth', who sat beside me, took time to explain some of the various 'laws' of their group, such as the following:

Never wear garb to your place of work. Even if everything else is dirty, don't just grab your garb and don it. Unless, of course, it's a formal occasion and everyone is dressing up - then you can get away with it. I did that once: everyone in my office was wearing tuxes, and I came in Renaissance garb. They loved it. Also, never wear short sleeves or any clothing that will reveal bruises after a combat event. And if your boss is in SCA too, don't try calling in sick after a midweek event - he'll probably be there, too. And if you're trying to get a day off - guess who'll get it!

Though such occasions as arts workshops and symposiums and the festive meals which often accompany them can be seen as intimate backstage glimpses into the world of re-enactment, they can also be seen as rehearsals in themselves, for the even more elaborate large-scale feasts which occur throughout the year. Some of these will be described in detail in the next chapter.

⁴⁹ In contrast, the other local group I became part of have strict rules against any titles not either won in combat or granted by a guild, and formally approved, while the public performing re-enactors used only actual titles which were held by historical personages they were portraying for a particular event.

Chapter Six: Sustaining the body - Feasting & Celebration

Theatre is one of the many inheritors of that great multifaceted system of preindustrial ritual which embraces ideas of cosmos and chaos, interdigitates clowns and their foolery with gods and their solemnity, and uses all the sensory codes, to produce symphonies in more than music: the intertwining of dance, body languages of many kinds, song, chant, architectural forms (temples, amphitheaters), incense, burnt offerings, ritualized feasting and drinking, painting, body painting, body marking of many kinds, including circumcision and scarification, the application of lotions and drinking of potions, the enacting of mythic and heroic plots drawn from oral traditions... (Turner 1990:12)

Sharing food and drink, in small gatherings, elaborate feasts, or picnics at historic sites, is one of the chief ways that re-enactors bind themselves together and form, or perform, a community. Because re-enactment cannot be accomplished in isolation, re-enactors need each other. The performance of community, therefore, is essential to the successful realisation of a distinctive identity. "By eating, dancing, singing, clowning, and drinking together, a 'we' group defines itself vis-a-vis a 'they' group" (Boissevain 1992:11). The most elaborate and formal private re-enactments are the feasts which are held several times a year. Much of the ceremony, as well as camaraderie of the groups is expressed through this practice. Mead (1931:7) called the medieval feast "perhaps the most characteristic feature of the social life of four or five hundred years ago" :

The Middle Ages eagerly seized upon any event that afforded a reasonable excuse for a banquet... coronation, a great victory, a marriage... the arrival of an ambassador... the Church festivals like Easter, Whitsunday, Christmas, and Twelfth Night (ibid:16).

Medieval feasts recognised existing social, kinship and political links between members of a community. Re-enactment feasts, in contrast, perform community, including elaborately developed fictive political, social and kinship ties. Performance is essential to the group's achievement of a sense of community and to its members' identity as re-enactors rather than 'mundanes'. Therefore, banquets are especially important events in the re-enactment calendar, and may either be held seasonally - for spring and autumn, or

the Celtic festivals of Yule, Samhain (Halloween) and Beltane (May Day), or simply called to celebrate certain themes. For example, one feast I attended re-created Heorot, the hall of the ancient Danish king Hrothgar in the epic poem *Beowulf*, with recitations of the saga and the invasion of the hall by the monster Grendel. A Byzantine feast included visits from 'foreign emissaries', new members who had recently joined the group.

In addition to eating and drinking there may be storytelling, juggling, singing, dancing, and instrumental music. Games include one in which a pomander ball - an orange studded with cloves - is passed around. Each gentleman may present the ball to a lady of his choice, who withdraws a clove 'to sweeten her breath' - and then rewards the gentleman with a kiss before passing it on in her turn. Another game resembled musical chairs, except that men and women take turns in a scramble to find a partner when the music pauses (there is always one person hiding). As more and more people are eliminated, the winner is the last person on the dance floor to claim a partner. Other, more ribald, events include a codpiece competition, or competitive dances or recitations of erotic poetry or songs. Important ceremonies, including the awarding of honours, swearing in of squires, conferral of knighthoods, and announcement of engagements, all take place during feasts.

Not only do these events serve to reunite group members, it rewards them for their "work of appropriation" (Appadurai 1986). They are acts of consumption in which raw materials (food, fabric, etc.) and knowledge are extracted from the mundane world and, through the shared labour of the re-enactors, transformed and served up in order to symbolise and celebrate the group's distinctiveness. Additionally, such banquets allow a group to invite "those members of other Realms which are held in esteem and friendship" (*Customs of the Realm xxi*). In other words, guests may include re-enactors from distant but affiliated societies or rival groups with whom they cooperate in combat training, staging public and private events, or sharing information. (This may include, for example, news of possible film roles, new publications or sources of supplies, warnings to avoid dangerous fighters or be on the lookout for stolen weapons or other

goods.) A well-staged feast allows a group to display its hospitality, generosity, its skills and talents, and strength in numbers. It is a prestigious event for the hosts, and serves to reinforce ties not only within the group but between groups as well. As Myerhoff (1990:248) has noted,

the persuasive, performative dimension of ritual is seen as highly significant in allowing individuals to collectively experience, perceive and portray their invented common, fictive reality, to themselves and witnesses.

Winter Banquet, Draconian Calendar AS X

This was the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Realm of Albion, and so in the Society's own calendar, 'Anno Societus X'. Many former members had returned from great distances to attend the feast - from as far afield as Spain and Finland. Great pains had been taken in ensuring the event would be memorable. The tickets to the feast had read:

In the interests of authenticity, no modern bottles on the tables and no flash photography during the event, please. Costumes and feast gear can be hired. **All weapons to be left at the door!**

There were between 50 and 100 people attending. As this was a reunion, rather than a themed event, there was no restriction as to the period of costumes allowed, and a great variety were present: rough homespun Viking *hangarok* dresses on several young women of 'Gunnar's household', but Ragnhild in a similar dress of woven silk, as befitted the rank of a Jarl's⁵⁰ wife. 'Gwenneth' wore a Tudor dress in shades of rust and orange, while 'Eleanor' had chosen a medieval outfit topped by a steeple hat and fluttering veil. Men wore the clothes of peasants and lords ranging from 10th to 15th century; tonight 'Gunnar' had adopted one of his alternative personas, as 'Sir John Elliot', a lord whose lands lay in the Scottish Borders during the time of Mary Queen of Scots. 'Gunnar'/'Sir John' retained his heraldic colours of blue and silver, however: but

⁵⁰ A Viking lord, from which the modern word 'earl' derives (Old Norse 'jarl'; Old English 'eorl').

rather than a Viking Jarl's flowing tunic, he wore a close-fitting brocade doublet, codpiece and leggings.

My partner and I had been loaned clothing from the stock held in the 'Keep' - a long simple deep red A-line medieval dress for me, and a tunic for him in a matching shade over dark blue woollen leggings. He had also been given leather shoes with extraordinarily long pointed toes. During the evening 'Sir John' spoke to me about the social meaning of various types of clothing. Many styles, he said, were specifically designed to display the owner's wealth and status, not only through their ornamentation, but also through the sheer volume of material used in their construction: at a time when fabric was costly, a full skirt, a trailing sleeve - or an excessively long toe on a shoe - were all signs that the wearer could afford waste.

He also spoke about the Renaissance as a time when male vanity was indulged to the full, as shown, he pointed out, in his own codpiece. During the Renaissance, he told me, men padded their codpieces, cut their clothes in order to make shoulders broader and waists narrower, wore fine silk hose and were even known to pad their calves in order to make their legs appear more shapely. The fashion of slashing sleeves, as on the doublet he modelled for me, was intended to allow the more expensive pure white silk or linen shirt to show through the less important brocade or velvet doublet.

The hall where the feast took place was lit by candles, and long tables had been set up in an inverted U-shape. As in medieval society, "[i]deally, man and master sat down together in the hall" (Henisch 1976: 17). However, distinctions were made subtly. At the far end of the hall, facing the door, was the head table, at which sat the Lord of the Realm, the Heads of various Orders, and their households. As Mead (1931:141) notes of medieval banquets,

Notable guests were always sat upon the dais and were thus raised somewhat above the level of ordinary diners. The tables, at least the more important, were covered with a cloth...

Although unable to construct a dais in the church hall used for the occasion, the 'high table' was distinguished from the others by its positioning in relation to the street entrance, thus avoiding noise and drafts. This table had the most elaborate and greatest number of candles, and was served first for all the courses. Similar practices, which he terms 'hierarchical commensality', were noted by Goody in the dining halls of Oxbridge colleges (1982:141, 143).



Figure 40 - a medieval feast; note the Banner of the Realm behind the 'high table'

Behind this table the Banner of the Realm, with its golden chalice against the Scottish saltire cross, was hung on the wall. Music was provided by members playing harp, mandolin, hurdy-gurdy, and other period instruments. 'Servants' were designated from those seated at the two long sides tables - myself among them - to carry out and dish up the two full courses, each complete with several 'removes': a soup, a meat dish, a cheese dish, a vegetable, and a dessert - and then the whole pattern repeated again, for a total of 10 dishes! These included peas potage, hare stew, turnips in cheese sauce, braised fennel in ginger, pears in red wine, then starting again with garlic soup, crustade of pigeon, cheese tarts, spring greens, down to the final dainty, marzipan sweetmeats. Mead notes that both the structure and menu of medieval feasting changed little between the Battle of Hastings and the early Renaissance (1931:17), with little set order to feasts,

and types of food being interspersed throughout the meal (ibid:155-160). The only concession I detected towards modern exigencies in re-enactors' banquets was the absence of fish, which I attributed to the expense and difficulty of preparing and deboning enough for a large company, and the inclusion of a vegetable or cheese option with every course. Although Goody (1982: 139) notes that in European courtly banquets, "[m]eat and its dismemberment played a great part in the cooking of this warrior aristocracy", and though it continues to be an important item in the shared meals of re-enactors, some effort was made to accommodate the possibility of vegetarian guests.

For this event, 'Ecce', in his Viking persona as 'Hrolf Arnorsson', assumed the title of 'Lord Albion', thus reigning as 'king' over the festivities⁵¹. He was presented with the regalia of the Realm: the Crown, Cup, and Candle. He accepted these formally, reciting:

I wear the crown, symbol of the honour of the Realm
*(while placing a crown, engraved with the symbols
of the cup and saltire, on his head);*

I drink from the cup, symbol of the merriment and
comradeship of the Realm
(then taking a drink from the chalice engraved with the same symbols);

I light the candle, symbol of the light and life of the Realm:
May it never falter nor fade
(while lighting a large blue candle marked with a white saltire cross).

Enright (1996:17) has described the importance of the role of liquor in religious rites of early Indo-Europeans, arguing that oaths made along with the acceptance of a ritual drink are more than mere boasting, but in fact 'incantations' fortifying the will of the speaker and his commitment to achieve great deeds for the sake of the group. Contributors to Mary Douglas' collection of anthropological studies on drinking practices note that even today in modern North American society, alcohol is often still

⁵¹ Unlike SCA re-enactors, members of the 'Realm of Albion' choose their reigning leader by popular vote rather than by combat. Having recently attended an SCA event, I made a *faux pas* when I addressed 'John Elliott' as 'liege'. This form of address, I was corrected, should only be used towards the reigning Lord Albion, and no other members were to be addressed by titles other than 'Sir' for those who had been knighted by the Court.

endowed with special qualities as “an elixir of life and strength, a reviver of spirits, a promotor of friendship and spur to courage in times of trial” (Antze 1987:162-3).

Gusfield (1987: 79) also notes the “festive character of alcohol use” and its function as “an accompaniment of social solidarity”, whose consumption “signals the exposure of the self to others within an atmosphere which is also protective” (ibid:81). This serves to transform the social person. However, one typical usage of alcohol in British and North American social contexts, as a ‘cover’ to excuse improper or immoral actions, is not a feature of re-enactment gatherings. Here, ‘gentles’ are expected to maintain themselves as such and conduct themselves chivalrously, avoiding gauche behaviour. Such strictures may be of particular importance when weapons are present in the feasting hall.

During the course of the evening, several knightings took place. The individuals who were deemed to have fully satisfied their combat training, and to have performed their duties as squires faithfully, were called forward into the open space before the head table and knelt before their own knights. They took oaths of fealty, and their elevation was approved by the Lord Albion. In addition, new members were accepted into the “three great orders of the Realm”:

The Order of the White Sparrow shall be granted for service to the Realm. The device of the order shall be: sable, a sparrow argent; For those who have served the Realm beyond the bounds of sanity, it shall be: sable, a sparrow mort argent. The title of members of the order shall be: “Comite”.

The Order of the Scarlet Wyrn (pronounced Wyrn) shall be granted for great endeavour in the arts of combat. The device of the order shall be: azure, a Wyrn rampant proper (and this is a red one). Members of the order shall bear the title “Sergeant”.

The Order of the Golden Spydere shall be granted for great endeavour in the gentler arts. The device of the order shall be: vert, a spider on a web or. Members of the order shall bear the title ‘Domine’. (*Customs of the Realm* xvi)

In other words, the three orders are represented by a) a silver sparrow, either dead or alive, against a black background; b) a red dragon on a blue background; c) a golden

spider on a web against a green background. One young woman was enrolled in the Order of the Golden Spydere, and another in the Order of the White Sparrow, but one young man outshone all the others by being enrolled in all three orders at once.

After the formal ceremonies were concluded, a variety of entertainments were provided, including music, games and dancing. A natural storyteller with a hearty voice, 'Hrolf' sang songs to the assembly. One told the tale of King Alexander III of Scotland, who had plunged off a cliff at Kinghorn while riding to see his pregnant wife. This was the event which led to the disputes between the Bruces, Balliols and Comyns over the throne of Scotland, eventually culminating in the Wars of Independence with Edward I of England. Hrolf next sang another ballad concerning the fighting between the infamous Black Douglas of Scotland and Percy of Northumberland.

Singing ballads in praise of warrior heroes was common among both Celtic and Germanic peoples. In this sense, 'Hrolf's' choice of entertainment can be seen as an attempt at authentically reproducing the period of his persona. However, although I believe that 'The Realm of Albion' was a largely apolitical group, I found it interesting that such important moments in the history of the Wars of Independence between Scotland and England were chosen. Although several group members are Scottish, others had come from England, America, or the Continent, and settled in Edinburgh. Of these, some had made an effort to 'adopt' the country, for example by giving their children Scottish names. The recitation of these key events, in which the emergent Scottish nation was attempting to define and demand its own identity, serves the function of demonstrating that identity to the listeners: it says, "this is who we are; this is where we come from". Simultaneously it allows the audience, who participate through the act of listening, and through their emotional response to the ballads, to partake of that identity. Turner (1990:13) has argued that both ritual and theatre alike derive from the liminal and reflexive redressive phase of social drama, in which

the contents of group experiences (*Erlebnisse*) are replicated, dismembered, remembered, refashioned and mutely or vocally made meaningful.

The group experiences in question here were the events surrounding the years of warfare and political struggle between Scotland and England during the late 13th and early 14th centuries. The language of the ballads is stirring and emotive. As with the best of theatre and film, audiences / hearers are drawn in and invited to sympathise with the protagonists of the stories. Hrolf's choice of themes, whether consciously or unconsciously, acted upon the banquet-goers to create an emotional identification with the Scottish protagonists: 'these are *our* boys!' A potential breach is thus addressed, and averted: regardless of place of birth or nationality, the feast-goers come to share a common identity. This process is rendered all the more effective by the fact that such intimate re-enactments are liminal events in which participants' identities are already in flux. Ritual performances do not merely 'act', but 'act upon': "[o]fficiants at a ritual transform rather than perform" (Tuan 1998: 242).

Such transformations, what Peacock terms "social consequences" (1968:7), occur subtly and indirectly. Unlike in some types of radical or polemic theatre, in which political commentary or argument may be addressed directly to the audience, here an alternative reality is created "by socially constructing a situation in which participants experience symbolic meanings as part of the process of what they are actually doing" (Schiefflin 1985: 709).

Later in the evening, Hrolf came over to where I was seated and played a game of '*raffel taffel*', a Norse chess-like game of black vs white pieces, which translates as "rascals" or "knaves' table". In a 'chivalrous' manner, Hrolf not only taught us the game, but also explained the best tactics to use against him, pointing out that the white pieces have the strategic advantage and then allowing us to have our choice of colour.

The evening ended with a 'musical partners' dance, something like an elaborate game of musical chairs. Men and women stood in a circle holding hands and facing inwards. As the music played, everyone danced clockwise for eight steps, and then each man took the woman to his right by both hands and swung her into the circle. With all the women now in the center, and the men forming a ring around them, one woman ducked behind

the outstretched skirts of the others to hide, while the other women joined hands and circled clockwise. The men in the outer ring circle danced and leapt at high speed first to the left, then to the right, then back again, until the music stopped, when they had to grab a woman as a partner - but of course, with one woman hidden, they were one 'short'. The man who fails to find a partner must leave the dance. This is then repeated, with the women having to circle around and grab a partner. The winning couple is the last one remaining.

Even those who were not always fond of dancing got into the spirit of this 'dancing game', lunging and grabbing partners in desperation as if they were the last member of the opposite sex alive. I soon had to drop out of the dance, but my partner, despite being hampered by his pointy toed shoes, was one of the last two men in the dance - the other being Hrolf, 'Lord Albion' himself. As the assembled watchers shouted for their favourites, the game grew more frantic, but 'Lord Albion' chivalrously 'allowed' my partner the victory (or so he later told me), and the last woman left on the dance floor was one who had travelled from Spain to be at the banquet that evening.

Many entertainments of this type are held during re-enactment feasts. Other amusements might include juggling, fortune telling, dice games, epic poetry, and on one occasion, a "cruelty-free Dancing Bear". At a recent feast held "In honour of St. Valentine", these also included "a cod-piece competition" and a game of "Blind Betrothal" (a spoof of the television programme *Blind Date*):

a fair maiden quizzes 3 young gallants in an effort to find her match.
Volunteers to take part still welcome. Proposed questions are along
the lines of 'My wicked uncle is holding me prisoner in a tower, how
do you propose to rescue me?'

Emphasis on entertainments not only extends the enjoyment of the event, but assists in creating the 'authenticity' sought by the re-enactors. It has been noted of historical banquets as well that:

A medieval feast worthy of the name proceeded at
a leisurely pace, with plenty of time between courses

to be filled by an entertaining host with incidental delights...
[and might include] players... tumblers or acrobats...
together with jugglers, animal trainers, conjurors, and comedians...
Knives are juggled, planks held on chins, goblets
set on sticks and balanced on foreheads. Little dogs
jump through hoops and men dance while playing
a triangle and gripping a candlestick with two candles
between the teeth... For gaeity there were tabors and drums,
bells and bagpipes... flutes and recorders were blended with...
bowed and plucked instruments, from fiddles and rebecs to
viols, lutes, harps and guitars. (Henisch 1976:206–210)



Figure 41 - musicians prepare to entertain the assembled feast guests

Other instruments included “trumpet, shawms, harps and small pipes”, while guests might join in dancing between courses or after the feast, and were often expected to sing or contribute a tale (Mead 1931:171-4).

Hrothgar's Hall

On the Feast Day of St. Edmund (November 20th) a great feast was held on the theme of the epic poem *Beowulf*. I had been asked to be 'bard' to Hrothgar, the King of the Danes whose great hall, Heorot, was being decimated by the ravages of the beast Grendel. I had to memorize my recitation, in which I regaled the assembled feast guests, using the alliteration beloved of the Norse and Saxon peoples, with the gruesome tale of the murders committed by 'the foul fiend' Grendel. We gathered on the evening before the feast at the hall where the meal would be held, and practiced our various parts. Iain, a large Viking-looking man with flowing blonde hair, had taken on the role of Grendel, for which he wore large rubber clawed 'monster hands'. Underneath one of them, he had a further fake hand, this one ending in a bloody stump with protruding bone, for the scene in which the hero Beowulf rips off his arm in combat. Ragnhild played Grendel's mother, who comes to avenge her son's death and mortally wounds Beowulf.

For this occasion the hall was decorated with painted cloth hangings with scenes of Norse warriors, mounted and in ships. 'Gunnar' took on the role of Hrothgar, 'Ecce' the role of Beowulf, and during the course of the evening we re-enacted the complete saga of Beowulf - a performance within a performance.

As always, the meal was carefully researched and prepared to be authentically 'in period' - ingredients and recipes of roughly the 8th century. I had been given a book of Anglo-Saxon recipes, and made a dessert of boiled barley and shredded carrot flavoured with honey and apples. It was essentially a slightly sweet, steamed pudding. Barley was the main grain used by the Anglo-Saxon people, and featured in several of the dishes, along with pork, and fish. In addition we had bread, dried raisins and nuts (although I noticed that an anachronistic intrusion, in the form of Brazil nuts, had found its way into the bowl of nuts!).

In preparation for the feast, my partner and I had been asked to submit personas, complete with names, household membership, social class and occupation, prior to the

feast, so that we could be announced, and properly seated, according to the hierarchy of the time. It was emphasized that ‘royal’ feasts of the middle to late Anglo-Saxon period (ca. 600 to 1000 AD) would be intimate affairs compared to later medieval or Renaissance events, involving the “household, loyal retainers (warriors), servants and honoured friends” of the king. One might come as a ‘thegn’⁵² (as in Shakespeare’s ‘Thane of Cawdor’), a king’s minister overseeing a territory roughly equivalent to a shire; or a ‘churl’ (a free land holder and commoner, from whence the word ‘churlish’ derives); or a ‘thrall’ (a slave, from which the term ‘enthralled’ originates).

I decided that we would be ‘churls’, a class of free people below the nobles or ‘jarls’ - rather like the yeomen of England - but above the ‘thralls’ or slaves. My partner was ‘Quivox, a travelling amber merchant, trading with the Saxons and Vikings’ and wore a huge chunk of amber on a heavy chain in order to advertise his calling; I was Devorgilla, a housekeeper in the household of Gunnar, descended from a freed Celtic slave. As churls, we were expected to attend upon Gunnar as Thegn of Lothene,⁵³ and serve food at the tables, but did not have to clean up afterwards (in the unusually democratic custom of the Realm, washing up is performed by the ‘nobles’!). For this feast then, I was involved in cooking and serving, as well as performing my role as ‘Bard’.

⁵² The title derives from the Anglo-Saxon term ‘to serve’, and described the manager of a princely demesne who administered justice, led the tenants into battle, and collected rents for the king, taking a portion as his own dues; usually short-term appointments rather than hereditary positions (Grant, A. 1998).

⁵³ This is the ancient name for the area now called the Lothians. The name derives from King Lot, who was reputed by some to be the uncle of King Arthur, and to have halls at Traprain Law in modern East Lothian, and at Dunedin (modern Edinburgh).

Byzantine Banquet

One of the last feasts I attended during my fieldwork was a Byzantine banquet in the winter of 2000, at which I was surprised, and honoured, to be asked to take the role of 'Lady Albion'. In this capacity, I was asked to preside at the High Table, perform the Ritual of Albion, approve the knighting - and betrothal - which took place, and greet the 'Ambassadors from Byzantium', in actual fact a contingent of Australian re-enactors who had arrived in Scotland. Their main period was Byzantine, and their presence had been the inspiration for the feast.

The feast hall was simply decorated, with the Banner of the Realm draped at the end of the room disguising the entrance. The church hall which is frequently used for the group's feasts has a porch-like entrance: one enters through double doors onto a roofed balcony, from which stairs run down at either side into the main room at a lower level. The banner had been hung from the roof of this balcony, or entry porch, so that people entering or waiting in the foyer could not see into the main hall itself. The tables had been placed, as always, in an inverted U, with the 'High Table' furthest from the entrance.

I had been married during my fieldwork, and at the insistence of my re-enactment friends, had done it "in period", as they do: in medieval dress, with ladies in waiting and a guard of honour in full armour. Our oaths were sworn on the crossed hilt of a sword, and the 'feast' of roast meats, cheeses, bread and fruit, mead and wine, was served in tents pitched in an open field. For the occasion of the Byzantine banquet, therefore, I wore my medieval wedding dress, as the only garment I had of the 'social status' appropriate for the role of Albion. The gown had a front panel of ivory silk embroidered with seed pearls, and an outer dress of pale green with trailing sleeves over inner tightly fitted sleeves of the same embroidered silk. On my head I wore a matching veil, also embroidered with pearls, and performed the Ritual of Albion, placing the crown over the veil with the same words I had heard spoken by 'Hrolf Arnorsson' when he had assumed that role at an earlier feast: "I wear the crown, symbol of the honour of the Realm".

I then drank mead from the cup, and lit the candle bearing the symbol of the realm with a taper which was provided for me. This ritual is performed in each feast - although the *personae dramatis*, the themes, decor, and menu, may change, the structure of the evening, the layout of the hall, the schedule of events, remain largely the same: "Rituals are re-enactments, not original occurrences, and they are repetitive and highly stylized." (Myerhoff 1990: 249). Through performing this ceremony, I was officially installed as 'Albion', the representative of the realm. I had chosen Ragnhild to be my herald, and she next ushered in and announced the visitors, in their personas as Byzantine ambassadors. I greeted them as I had been instructed: "The Realm of Albion welcomes all who come here in peace and in the spirit of friendship".

The ambassadors returned our greeting, reading formally from a long parchment scroll. It contained a message of well-wishing from "the Byzantine emperor", and was couched in elaborate and flowery language. It requested that we "respect his embassy as his own person", and furthermore that "all supporters of the Christian faith offer their aid" to him as he was under assault by infidels, and assuring us that "knights and warriors joining the Holy Crusade would be well rewarded". In token of this, the ambassadors offered a gift of gold (in reality gold foil-wrapped coins in a carved wooden casket) and wine in a slender Byzantine glass pitcher. Finally, we were presented with "the book of the Faith" as a gift from the Emperor. This turned out to be a small piece of heavy parchment-like paper folded over several times. Upon opening it, I found it was inscribed with 3 crosses and the words "Be Good".⁵⁴

I then responded to the ambassadors as I had been instructed, saying: "The Realm of Albion is honoured to have such illustrious travellers grace our table - please sit with us." Mead (1931:17) notes that medieval banquets were "a favourite means of manifesting the wealth and social importance of the donor"; moreover "hospitality was a primary tool of politics" (Goody 1982:141). In modern-day re-enactment practice as

⁵⁴ The group often struggles with the challenges of being 'authentically in period' while remaining non-religious and non-political as required by a modern-day 'politically correct' society.

well, a successful feast, with its profusion of food and ceremony, both rewards members and displays the group's skills and resources to visiting re-enactors and newcomers alike.

The High Table at this feast thus included the three 'Byzantine ambassadors', myself as Lady Albion using the persona name 'Devorgilla' (the name of the wife of John Balliol, and founder of Sweetheart Abbey in the Scottish Borders), while my partner had been announced under the name 'Quivox' (an early Celtic saint from the southwest of Scotland). I had also asked 'Fion Tormundottir', sister of 'Gunnar', to join us at the High Table, along with her escort 'Hrolf Arnorsson', as they were to play an important part in one of the final ceremonies of the evening. 'Fion' confided in me that she and 'Hrolf' had become engaged 5 days earlier, on Valentine's Day. She admitted that she'd planned to wait until the 29th of February, explaining that the custom in Britain allowed a woman to ask a man to marry on Leap Year Day. But she decided to break with custom and ask him on Valentine's Day instead, and had been accepted. Their formal betrothal was to be announced at the climax of the feast.

We noticed that 'Hrolf' had laid his sword upon the feast table, and 'Quivox' asked whether it was appropriate to have a weapon at table during a feast, especially in the presence of 'foreign ambassadors'. I responded that I didn't know what the Byzantine custom was, and hoped they wouldn't be offended. When I enquired about it, 'Hrolf' assured me that I needn't worry, as the sword had been "peace-bonded". I did not understand this term, and when I asked for a further explanation he reached over and showed me that the weapon had been tied into its sheath, "so that it can't be drawn quickly, or in anger - or before older and wiser heads can restrain me".

He informed me that as a Knight of the Order of the Scarlet Wyrn, he was allowed to retain his weapon, peace-bonded, in the presence of Albion. Others of the 'Chivalry' of Albion - in other words, those who were knighted, but not members of the Order of the Scarlet Wyrn - could wear their weapons peace-bonded with the permission of both the Master of Arms (which at this point in time was Gunnar) and Lord or Lady Albion. He

then formally sought my permission, which I granted. 'Hrolf' also explained to me that only the Master of Arms, and the Champion of the Realm (currently Gunnar's wife, Ragnhild) could wear their weapons unsheathed, and un-bonded, at a feast. Gunnar, overhearing this, explained to me that this was necessary "so that we can bring order in case any of those wearing peace-bonded weapons attempted to unsheathe them, or in case the hall was attacked."

It is interesting to note that knives, no matter how large, are considered tools, not weapons, and may be had at table despite the prohibition on arms without permission. Some of the eating utensils used by the re-enactors were quite formidable; Gunnar had a large spiked skewer of wrought iron, twisted in the middle and with a small loop on the end for hanging from a belt. He explained that this was a forerunner of the fork, which did not appear until the later middle ages, and was used for spearing food such as meat and potatoes from stews or platters.

The meal for this feast was mostly Grecian in style: there were pita breads, taramasalata, hummus⁵⁵, feta cheese, and stuffed grape leaves on the table, along with bowls of nuts and dried raisins and golden sultanas. We drank both mead and red wine, and the retsina which had been brought by the Ambassadors, from carved horn cups. The first series of courses of the feast included cous-cous, chicken cooked in red wine, a potato and onion stew, and a black-eyed bean cold salad, as a first 'remove'. We ate these with horn and pewter utensils from pottery and carved and polished wooden bowls.

In order to work up an appetite for the second remove, or series of courses, we then had music and dancing. We began with a peasant circle dance, one in which we did a 'grapevine' step, one foot crossing behind the other as the dancer steps sideways, then crossing in front, and so on - as many people have probably seen in the film '*Zorba the Greek*'. After a couple of vigorous dances, there was a stately processional dance for couples.

⁵⁵ Taramasalata is made with fish eggs, bread crumbs, olive oil and lemon juice; hummus with chickpeas and tahine (sesame paste); the grape leaf bundles filled with rice or meat.

Unfortunately the more energetic dances had left me slightly tired, and the tightly laced corset of my medieval gown 'fankled' (a Scots word for twisted), so it was difficult to do justice to the second series of dishes which were presented at the feast table.

Although the hour was growing late - it was past 10 p.m., three hours after the feast first commenced - the night was far from over. There followed another five dishes, including roast pork with crackling, and a variety of elaborate sweetmeats: dates stuffed with marzipan and walnuts, melomakarona (Grecian honey spice cookies), and baklava (filo pastry layered with honey and walnuts) in various shapes: traditional small rolls, pretty split-cross bun shapes, and layered with coconut topping and lemon flavouring.

After the last of these dishes was removed, I was asked to come forward into the central space between the three feast tables, and was seated upon a stool draped with a smaller version of the flag of Albion. In front of me, a cushion embroidered with the symbols of the realm - the saltire and the chalice - was placed, upon which supplicants and those seeking knighthood could kneel. As my chosen herald, Ragnhild, reigning Champion of the Realm, made the announcements and proclamations in my place.

There were two important ceremonies, in addition to the presentation of other honours. The first of these was the knighting of 'Rhodri of Flint', squire to Sir Gunnar. The last was the formal betrothing of 'Hrolf', former squire to Gunnar, and 'Fion', Gunnar's sister. For the ceremony of the knighting, the candidate and his own knight, along with two senior members of the Chivalry, and fellow members of the Order of the Scarlet Wurm, stepped into the space before me, between the three feasting tables, while I remained seated as 'Albion'. 'Sir Gunnar' took the cushion which had been lying in front of my stool and placed it on the floor before him as he stood in the centre. His squire, 'Rhodri', came forward silently and knelt before him, and my herald, Ragnhild, announced that this suppliant sought entry into the ranks of the Chivalry of the Realm, with the approval of Albion and the assembled nobles. Gunnar declared that the squire Rhodri had served him faithfully - and then, to my shock, struck him a hard, though flat-

handed, blow to the chest. As he did this, Gunnar called out, “May this be the last blow you take without returning”.

After this, the Champion of the Realm, and Sir Hrolf, who had once been Gunnar’s squire himself, stepped up behind the kneeling Rhodri, each bearing an iron spur. As members of the warrior’s Order, they each bent to place a spur on his feet, while he remained kneeling. At this point the solemnity of the moment was slightly breached, as Sir Hrolf joked loudly that for a skinny guy Rhodri had big feet. Gunnar responded that he was lucky; when Hrolf himself had knelt as a squire and been raised to knighthood, he hadn’t been wearing any shoes at the time, and it was quite painful! (In fact, despite the formality of the ceremony, Sir Hrolf was once more choosing to go barefoot, declaring “shoes are for wimps”).

Next, ‘Sir Andrew Montgomerie’, who had been one of the founders of the ‘Realm’ ten years earlier, came forward bearing Rhodri’s sword in its sheath, attached to a leather belt. He draped the belt around Rhodri’s neck and over one shoulder, so that the belt was hanging diagonally across his chest.⁵⁶ When both spurs and sword were in place, Gunnar asked if Rhodri would swear fealty to him. Rhodri agreed to do so, and signified this by placing his folded hands between those of Gunnar. Gunnar then asked: “Do you swear to uphold, support and pledge loyalty to me in all things?” to which an affirmative answer was given. He then told Rhodri: “And I also pledge to support and protect you with all my power. Arise, Sir Rhodri of Flint.”

⁵⁶ Interesting symbolic parallels exist between such knightings and the enthroning of the victorious bardic poet in the Welsh *Eisteddfod*, as described by Davies: “For this ceremony the main pavilion is full and on stage are the members of the *Gorsedd* in full druidic costume. Entries for all the literary competitions are ... all identified only by their bardic pseudonyms... the archdruid extend[s] an invitation for the winning poet, ‘Porthor’ (caretaker), to stand. Heraldic trumpets are sounded... the winning poet is met by a party from the platform, who place a robe around his shoulders... With the victorious bard standing before his chair, a sword held over his head is unsheathed as the archdruid proclaims ‘Y gwir yn erbyn y byd. A oes heddwch?’ (‘The truth against the world. Is there peace?’), to which the audience responds ‘Heddwch’ (‘Peace’) and the sword is returned to its sheath.” (1998:146-7)

After the knighting ceremony was complete, 'Aldis Jorundsdottir', "foster daughter" to Ragnhild in the household of Gunnar, and Seneschal of the Realm, stepped into the central court to present to Sir Rhodri a scroll 'for his gallantry':

sent by a lady from a distant land in thanks for his assistance
and protection in seeing her safely returned to her homeland.
She conveyed this scroll to me that I might present it to him.

It seemed that 'Rhodri' had helped a former member, who had now returned to live in the United States, with her move, escorting her to the airport and waiting with her for her plane. She wished to thank him and have his courtesy to her formally acknowledged during his knighting. She had written out a declaration of his 'gallantry' in fine calligraphic script on heavy parchment and had it sent over so that it could be read out during the feast.

Further scrolls were also awarded to other members present. 'Siobragh' was awarded membership in the Order of the Golden Spydere for her skills in calligraphy. Like the declaration of gallantry, this scroll was beautifully written and illuminated by hand in rich colours. Two further scrolls were awarded to 'Aldis' and 'Freydis Haraldsdottir', also a member of the household of Gunnar. For "Services to the Realm", they were awarded membership in the Order of the White Sparrow. As these services had primarily entailed looking after the two young Gunnarsdottirs, it was thought appropriate that their scrolls were written by the girls themselves in their own handwriting. Whether simple or grandiose in style and content, it is through such spectacles as knightings and the granting of awards that "the recognition of individual accomplishments... alter permanently the social status of those so exalted." (Davies 1998).

Handfasting - creating formal ties that bind

In his work among the Primitive Baptists of southern Virginia, Peacock (1990:220) noted that the characteristic chanted sermons of the church Elders managed to "interweave performance with kinship relationships, life history, doctrine, and other frameworks to contain form within meaning."

Private performances among re-enactors also weave together doctrine, personal autobiography, comradeship and kinship to create meaning. The complexity and ritual nature of feasting events allows many of these themes to be elaborated in turn. This can be seen particularly through what Myerhoff has termed 'definitional ceremonies' (1975:22) which symbolise communal ideology and serve to sum up group identity, or distill it into its purest form. An example of this concentration of form and meaning may be seen in the final ceremony of the evening, the betrothing.

Gunnar called forward his former squire, Hrolf, who approached along with Fion, who had been seated at the High Table throughout the earlier ceremonies. 'Sir Andrew Montgomerie' also stood forward as a witness and member of the Chivalry. Gunnar announced loudly that:

I am authorized to speak for my father, who could not be here tonight, concerning my sister's betrothal. We are well pleased with the match. We intend to give Fion in her own name a grant of two and a half hectares of land in the province of _____, where she might retire should she need respite from her husband; in addition the right to gather shellfish from the bay adjoining said lands.

Sir Hrolf then stepped forward, and vowed to match this gift, promising to grant:

my future wife, in her own name, two and a half hectares of land in the high valley of _____ in Fife, and the stipend needed to maintain ten gamekeepers on said land to preserve its hunting.

Sir Andrew announced to the assembly that: "This total of 5 hectares will be hers in perpetuity to support her and to be passed on to her children".

Each of the three men present then asked for a witness from the assembly to verify their pledges. The newly knighted Sir Rhodri stepped forward to witness Sir Hrolf's pledge; the two Byzantine ambassadors as honoured guests vowed to act as witnesses for the pledges of Sir Gunnar and Sir Andrew. In the role of 'Albion', I declared as I had been taught that: "We are well pleased with this betrothal".

Several themes of concern to re-enactors can be seen at play in the foregoing scenes. Chief among them perhaps is the communal nature of the event. Enright (1996:16) illustrates that among ancient Germanic and Norse peoples, “[c]ommunal feasting was the outward sign of mutual dedication demanded by the archaic mind-set”; moreover “fictive kinship [was] created through a convivial communion at the feast, a drinking which serves as a substitute for blood”. Such commensality is equally important in the modern-day practice of creating the ‘invisible kingdoms’ of re-enactment. Guests at the feast do not remain passive observers to the betrothing - rather they participate actively, validating the event and acting as quasi-legal witnesses to the vows. By verifying their pledges, the witnesses also place those who had so sworn under an obligation, not only to the recipient (Fion), but to the community of re-enactors who have participated in the ceremony. As Tuan (1990:242) writes,

They participate as members of a congregation, whose lives will be affected by how the ritual is conducted. Insofar as ritual celebrates a success - important birth or harvest - it has some of the informal attributes of a festival. But to the degree that it claims to uphold a world, a certain seriousness and compulsion for precision prevails.

The choice of models for this ceremony - a Viking betrothing rite - is also of significance. Both ‘Hrolf’ and ‘Gunnar’ enact several historical periods, but the epoch of Viking exploration and occupation of the northern British Isles is perhaps their key, or ‘home’, period - the one to which they have devoted most time, and the one *in* which they spend most time. ‘Gunnar’ himself in fact celebrated his own wedding in Viking style, and the ‘family tree’ which details their fictive extended household⁵⁷, as well as the tapestry⁵⁸ embroidered by Ragnhild to commemorate their wedding, both incorporate Norse persona names and clothing.

Another factor in this choice was the internal meaning of the ceremony itself. Although the betrothed woman does not speak throughout the rite, and therefore is seemingly marginalised, the effect of the pledges is to recognise her social status as an independent

⁵⁷ See Appendix 3

⁵⁸ See Appendix 4

person capable of holding and managing property, and to grant the legal and financial wherewithal to do so. In describing her own wedding to me, Ragnhild had explained the significance of Gunnar handing to her a large set of keys. At the time of the marriage, she said, the Viking man was obliged to hand over the keys to all his goods and property to his wife, who would thereafter manage them. Failure to do this would annul the marriage. For many of the group's members, this seemed to provide an admirable model for a marriage in which both parties enjoyed equal financial and social standing - a model more suited to their 21st century values, perhaps, than the Judeo-Christian based marriages of medieval and later times, in which both the woman and her dowry became in effect the property of the husband. In what is often seen as the more 'primitive' Norse society, the possibility of a marriage dissolving was recognised, and its economic effects safeguarded against, by acknowledging the married woman as an individual rather than an extension of her husband's person.

As Herzfeld has demonstrated, "people deploy the debris of the past for all kinds of present purposes" (1997:24). Their knowledge, and appropriation, of many 'pasts', allows re-enactors a particularly rich trove of practices from which to draw. As Turner (1990:9) has argued,

meaning... is engendered by marrying present problems of the living present to a rich ethnic past, which is then infused into the doings and undergoings of... the local community... by their activation, groups take stock of their own current situation: the nature and strength of their own social ties, the power of their symbols, the effectiveness of their legal and moral controls, the sacredness and soundness of their religious traditions, and so forth.

With the betrothal now concluded, the herald stepped forward and declared the feast to be concluded. However, most of the assembled guests returned to their seats for more wine and sweetmeats, which continued to be passed around, or gathered around to congratulate the new couple.

As the tables began to be cleared and the dishes washed, Ragnhild declared that she wished to have a record of this occasion. To my surprise, she revealed a camera that she

had smuggled into the hall, hidden away under a pile of cloaks behind the High Table. Now that the feast was over, and 'verisimilitude' could no longer be violated, she asked that all members of Gunnar's household assemble for a 'family photo'. I was surprised, and pleased, to be asked to join this group, in my persona as 'Devorgilla'. This occasion was the first time I became aware that I had been accepted as a member of the extended household.

Through communal feasts and initiation ceremonies, seasonal and life-cycle rituals, re-enactors perform, not only a recreated moment in time, but the creation of new bonds. Values of hospitality, loyalty, courtesy, good humour, are praised and held up as models to new members. Through dispensing honours and awards, the diligence and commitment of individuals are rewarded, while at the same time they are held up as exemplars for the community. By bringing members into closed orders, into fictive 'households', or through actual legal marriage, re-enactors are bound to each other and to the ethos of the group. As Geertz has written, rituals have the effect of "fusing the dreamed-of and the lived-in orders of reality" (1966:28).

It is not only through feasts, combat training, dances, bardic circles, and workshops that re-enactors work to recreate the past and create new re-enactors. They also hold seasonal events, such as annual picnics in the spring and autumn, usually held at ruined castles. Those such as Craigmillar Castle, on the outskirts of Edinburgh, and Dirleton Castle, in East Lothian, are owned by Historic Scotland, and re-enactors often seek their permission to use these spaces to hold such events. As long as the group agrees to abide by strict standards of authenticity, and to be aware of public safety, this is usually granted, as it is seen to enhance the experience of visitors.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, 'private performers' also bring historical re-enactment into the significant occasions of their daily lives in the 'mundane' world as well. In particular, special occasions such as graduations are marked by a ceremonial arch of swords, under which the new graduate marches, in a fashion still seen at military academies. For weddings, which are often held with both guests and newlyweds in

historical dress, a guard of honour or arch of swords are often provided for the bride and groom. Thus some of the key life-cycle rituals which are still observed in Western society are incorporated and brought from the secular into the sacred space of ritual. Peacock (1990:209) has investigated the “intensified union of form and meaning” which make up both sacred and profane performances, and seeks the connections between such performances and routine or mundane life, noting that:

[t]o the extent that a performance is profane, the pattern would seem to emphasize separation of the performance from the rest of one’s life, while sacred performances accord with a pattern emphasizing unity of performance with the rest of one’s life (ibid).

The more significant the meaning of a performance, then, the more this meaning will spill over - overflowing the ‘form’ of the performance, the container, and permeating the larger life outwith the performance. As evidence of this, Peacock contrasts the performances of a priest and a movie star: the latter is free to assume other roles after stepping off-camera, but the priest stepping away from the pulpit has no such freedom (1990:209).

The “semiotic bricolage” (Herzfeld 1997) through which elements of the historical past are salvaged and incorporated into present performance, and the movement of those performances from a public stage to the enclosed world of private ritual, indicates not a shrinking or lessening of significance, but an expansion of meaning. For those who have found within a historical (or mythical) past the materials to construct the values and practices of an alternative present, this expanded meaning often cannot be contained within the boundary ropes which frame public performances. The operative message within such intimate performances is “Let us believe” (Handleman 1977:187). Within this “invisible kingdom” is created:

an invented, recent culture that is an adaption to contemporary circumstances... Here ‘doing is believing’, and members of the new culture perform: to behold themselves, finally becoming what they behold (Myerhoff 1990:248).

Ultimately, such private performances may reflect what Boissevain sees as a growing trend within ritual practice throughout Europe, in which celebrations focus on the community, and in which there is an increasing emphasis on an internal, rather than external audience; “insider events [which] quite consciously promote group and village solidarity” (Boissevain 1992:6) These symbolic actions simultaneously strengthen the individual’s identity vis-a-vis the social group (Cohen 1985:50). Boissevain writes that, increasingly aware of an evaluating external gaze, festal celebrations “have assumed a more instrumental dimension”, and combine ‘retraditionalization’ with playful innovation and invention, allowing traditional forms to acquire new meanings and cater to new interests (1992:4). Within these intimate spaces, mythic and historic materials are restored, reused; interpretations of the past become “repertoires for imagining” (Macdonald 1997: 21) - e.g., that ‘we have always been unique / cosmopolitan / egalitarian / strong’. “Increasingly, people seek out community celebrations to soften, for short moments, the alienation that has accompanied increased affluence and independence” (Boissevain 1992:8).



Figure 42 - a re-enactment at Dunfermline Abbey to celebrate a local history day

Public Performances

Chapter Seven: 'Ancient Ayrshire': Staging the Past

The theatre, when it was still part of religion, was already theatre: it liberated the spiritual energy of the congregation or tribe by incorporating myth and profaning or rather transcending it. The spectator thus had a renewed awareness of his personal truth in the truth of the myth... (Grotowski 1968)

It was a theatre-state in which the kings and princes were the impresarios, the priests the directors, the peasantry the supporting cast, stage crew, and audience... Mass ritual was not a device to shore up the state; the state was a device for the enactment of mass ritual. To govern was not so much to choose as to perform. (Geertz 1973:335)

In the private performance of the past among re-enactors, the inclusion of ritual elements and the strict adherence to form - to verisimilitude - delineate these as examples of a practice of shared belief. In the public performances, on the other hand, there is a pronounced emphasis on play, on humour, on 'over-acting', on display for attention. Dialogue over the veracity, and ownership, of the past, and disputes over conflicting popular or academic versions of that past, are overt. It is in this large-scale public arena - in both 'front stage' and 'backstage' areas - that rival groups' assertions of knowledge, skill and authenticity are critically debated or decried. Unlike the performers of puppet masquerades in Central Mali studied by Arnoldi (1995), who may come from the same village or quarter, large-scale re-enactment events in Scotland, as elsewhere in Britain, draw performers from great distances, who may only see each other at annual events. Thus, some groups find little motivation to 'mask' the competition that often underlies these gatherings, and stories related by staff at some of the event venues indicate that 'friendly' rivalry may break out into something quite different (Finnigan 1999: pers. comm.).

While some groups advertise themselves as 'Living History' groups, others acknowledge that they are primarily 'Battle Re-enactment' groups, and still others use the term 'Experimental Archaeology' to describe their activities. However, despite their orientation, all of the public groups share in common the inclusion of combat display as

part of their performance. Although the focus, or degree of emphasis, may differ, few if any groups can fill a large venue with exhibitions of dance, music, falconry or weaving, and all must include weapons and their use within their programmes. As one re-enactor told me:

Because they've really come to see a battle re-enactment, and the living history bit is nice, but only if you've got good weather to stand and look at it. You know, it's one thing to stand in the rain watching a battle, it's another to stand in the rain watching somebody make chainmail, which is quite boring, really...

I then asked: "You think that's really what's pulling the audiences then, is the battle?" to which he responded:

It's the battle, it's the good old Roman gladiator thing. I think people would still come to see people chop each other up with real weapons - if they were allowed to.



Figure 43 - a gathering of Royalists

Most of the re-enactments I will describe in this chapter were large-scale events⁵⁹ at sites owned by The National Trust for Scotland - the counterpart of the English National Trust - or Historic Scotland. While many believe the latter also to be a private trust, it is actually an agency of the Scottish government, answerable to the Scottish Executive in Edinburgh, and is the sister agency of English Heritage in England. Only one of the events I attended, at Buittle Castle in the Borders, was on the estate of a private landowner. The majority of the venues, then, are in some form of public ownership, and the sponsorship of events at the sites reflects, I believe, not only a concern with meeting public demand for entertainment, but a sense of stewardship and the duty of education which such properties entail. Re-enactments of battles and 'living history' help with the financial up-keep of such large-scale venues, and the popularity of such performances may help in the competition for grants or public monies as well.

The nature of most battle re-enactments require that they be performed in large, often open, spaces, and thus many of the re-enactment groups had, as their numbers swelled, moved from private, small-scale and intimate performances to large-scale public ones. This requirement for space also changed the nature of re-enactments. Unless the re-enactors were wealthy enough to own their own land (as is the case with one Border Reiver re-enactor who owns his own Scottish tower house and stable of 'garrons'⁶⁰), or were prepared to hire out venues such as church halls, in which some activities are often limited by fire and safety regulations, they had to seek approval from public bodies such as city councils, schools, or government or private trusts such as Historic Scotland or National Trust for Scotland to use their properties. The use of such spaces meant that re-enactors soon had audiences who were not themselves re-enactors - who were, in a sense, 'time tourists'. Whether willingly or not, re-enactors found themselves therefore moving from private to public performers to instructors and teachers. This may be a

⁵⁹ Even the smallest, which featured only 2 re-enactors, was based on a demonstration of armour and weapons and a duel.

⁶⁰ Small, sturdy Scottish ponies.

large part of the reason that authenticity and accuracy have become so central to most re-enactment groups.

‘Ancient Ayrshire’

The first re-enactment event I attended during my early fieldwork was at Stirling Castle in Central Scotland, on a cold blustery Easter Sunday in 1998. The castle, once home to the Stewart kings, overlooks the site of the famous battles of Stirling Brig and Bannockburn, sites of Scottish triumph over English invaders dear to the hearts of Scottish nationalists. Clouds scudded overhead as I approached the castle walls, and during the course of the event the Scottish weather would treat us to its infinite variety, including sunshine, wind and even snow showers during the climax of the re-enactment battle.

There are two gardens within the walls of the castle itself, as well as a large cobble-paved inner courtyard. The event took place in the smaller of the two gardens in the rear of the castle. Known as the Douglas Garden, it was named for a noble who, according to the Historic Scotland events organizer who introduced the performance, had been murdered by being thrown out of a window which overlooks the arched stone passageway through which the garden is entered. Thus the often violent history of the space in which the historical battle was to be presented was foregrounded in this official narrative.

On this particular Easter day the re-enactment, by a group who I will refer to as ‘Ancient Ayrshire’, from Girvan, a town on the west coast of Scotland, was advertised in the Historic Scotland member’s brochure as recreating the period of the Scottish Wars of Independence.⁶¹ The group had pitched some rough-looking canvas tents around the periphery of the walled garden, and period weapons including pikes and halberds⁶²

⁶¹ Late 13th to early 14th centuries.

⁶² Pikes are heavy long-hafted spears, sometimes 10 feet or more in length, which were used by men in tight formations against mounted knights - it was these which defeated the superior English forces at Bannockburn. Halberds are also long-hafted weapons, like spears, but with heavy axe heads.

leaned against trees and weapon stands near the tents. I was surprised, upon this first encounter, to notice that this large group included women and children in its ranks. In all, there were over 20 re-enactors on the field.

It is interesting to note the ambivalent position of women within the re-enactment world. In one of the longest-established groups, which I first encountered several years prior to beginning fieldwork, women were clearly relegated to a subordinate status, both verbally and spatially. They are omitted entirely from the group's performance, and when I sought out some of the women 'backstage' and spoke to them about this, they seemed both embarrassed and apologetic for their subsidiary role - "that's the way it was back then", one woman told me with an embarrassed laugh. This raised two questions in my mind - firstly, whether or not it was historically accurate that in Highland Scotland of the early 18th century women were excluded and ignored by men as a general rule - and secondly, and separately, what would make this behaviour acceptable, not to say desirable, to both men and women of the late 20th century?

In all of the other groups which I encountered or with which I travelled and performed over a longer period of time, the situation was much different, however. In every case these groups were founded by men; this was true of both the Covenanting groups and all three of the medieval groups with which I had extended contact. However, and significantly, it was largely the work and input of women that kept these groups running on an ongoing, day-to-day basis, and which saw them not only surviving but growing. Women I spoke with had gotten involved in re-enactment for a wide variety of reasons - in fact there often seemed to be more 'paths' or interests which had led women to join than was the case for men.

While observing Ancient Ayrshire prepare for their performance, I realized that several of the 'knights' and warriors were women, dressed in male 'garb', including helmets and chainmail. This was my first encounter with the reality, ignored or even disguised in most publicity brochures as well as in film and television appearances, of the number of women in most re-enactment groups. It eventually became clear that the importance of

women in the 'work of appropriating' the past cannot be underestimated - through their contributions to 'living history' displays and their organizational and support roles, as well as in combat.

Although they appear in photographs and montages within publicity brochures, or in Historic Scotland's own members magazine, they rarely feature on publicity posters or front covers of events brochures. In my experience, however, women re-enactors did not contest this state of invisibility, and might even be seen to collude with it, in that those women who do appear in key promotional images do so 'as men' - dressed in armour, with helmets obscuring their features. This has little to do with self-effacement, however, and more to do with the recognition, on the part of both public performers and sponsors, that what audiences come to see are battle re-enactments, rather than 'living history' displays of weaving, candle-making or herbal remedies.



Figure 44 - Ancient Ayrshire stage a battle between a Covenanter shiltron and Royalist soldiers. The tall soldier in the foreground on the right, in a gray jacket, is a woman.

Interestingly, the 'women warriors' I spoke with throughout my fieldwork referred to history as the justification for their participation in what many in the larger society perceive as the 'male arena' of armed combat. Again and again, I was told that 'women

in this period *did* fight. The historical records have just been forgotten or purposely lost'. More recent feminist historical analyses often seem to back up these claims. For example, in Ellis' study of Celtic women in early European society, he discovered that:

It is clear from historical evidence that Irish women could take part in the military muster of the clan and command armies in battle. In Ireland, this role seems to have finally ended when Admonan succeeded in having his *Lex Innocentium* or 'law of the innocents' adopted at the Synod of Birr in AD697 (Ellis 1995:118).

Thus, 'authenticity' rather than personal preference was cited as the rationale behind women's taking up the sword.⁶³ Schechner (1982:52) characterizes such processes as 'restored behaviour', in which a 'so-called prior event' is "created in the future... projected backwards in time... and restored 'now'". The generation of the intended performance is accomplished by modelling actions upon earlier events which have been 'recollected' - "in a sense the future is causing the present, which, in turn, makes it necessary to research, remember - rehearse- the past" (ibid:53).

However, in examining such behaviour it is necessary to take into account not only the intentionality or agency of the performer, but the impact upon the recipient - the audience. As Schieffelin (1998: 195) writes, "performances aim to evoke an imaginative reality or an intensification of experience among the spectators, and bring about an altered awareness of their situation and / or a sense of emotional release." Peacock elaborates that "[p]erformances provide a set of symbols in terms of which actors and spectators alike can categorize experience, as well as a set of social actions with which they can identify" (1968:8).

For many re-enactors, then, a present-day ideal - the total equality of women in all aspects of action - is set in a 'restored' past, which becomes a blueprint for an idealized

⁶³ On one occasion, Katrin, a member of Ancient Ayrshire who I came to know well as a 'woman warrior', allowed me to see a video made of some of the group's early performances some years previously. I was surprised to recognise her in a medieval dress with a tall steeped hat trailing a veil. When I complimented her appearance she expressed great embarrassment at being seen in a dress, and said she'd hoped I wouldn't recognise her.

future. This potentially revolutionary message often became lost, however. Barnes & Eicher note that dress both indicates and also produces gender (1993:7). To the extent that the female combatants successfully became 'warriors', complete with heavily padded armour and full-face helmets, their gender also became obscured. The degree to which gender identity remains firmly attached to both behaviour and clothing type was revealed during one show in St. Andrews. Ragnhild had taken the field to spar with her squire, Rhodri. As she had not been intending to fight that day, she wore a long woolen laced-front medieval dress rather than the mail armour she usually donned for combat. The long skirt did not hamper her fighting skill, however, and she easily trounced Rhodri despite his youth and strength. One audience member near me commented in puzzlement, "Why is that man wearing a dress?" Eicher & Roach-Higgins argue that "we can expect dress to precede verbal communication in establishing an individual's gendered identity as well as expectations for other types of behaviour (social roles) based on this identity" (1993:17). To the extent that Ragnhild had successfully taken on behaviour identified as male (success in combat), other indicators - including dress and bodily shape - became invisible, or ceased to make sense to the viewer / speaker.

Dress may also operate to neuter, or create an 'unsexed' body - for example in the public school uniforms of British girls' boarding schools (Okely 1978), or by overlaying female bodies with "masculine identity markers - cropped or hidden hair, male headgear, a collar and tie", as Malcolm Young discovered in his studies of policewomen's uniforms (1993:273). He argues that in the police force, the "metaphors and symbols of the warrior life are taken on as basic ideological tools of the male 'prestige structures'" (Young 1993:267) and that women must adopt these symbols in order to operate within this milieu (see also Ortner & Whitehead 1981:13). Similar processes operate within the public displays of historical battle re-enactments which feature large numbers of 'men at arms', in which women warriors virtually vanish. Here also, "women do not 'naturally' disappear from... social space; rather, their absence is socially created and constantly reaffirmed until it then becomes the norm" (Young 1993:283).

Sponsors or promoters of public re-enactments do not alone create this invisibility, however. Hughes-Freeland and Crain (1998) argue that audiences and other consumers often have a great deal of agency in terms of their interpretation or 'refashioning', not only of objects ranging from cookery books to handicrafts, but of other cultural products as well, such as television programmes, sporting events, music, dance and dramatic performances. Whether they are purchasers, spectators, readers, or viewers, both individuals and groups actively engage in the 'work of appropriation' (Appadurai 1986), reshaping the desired object, or performance, to their own needs - which may often be at odds with those of the re-enacting performer.

Prior to the commencement of Ancient Ayrshire's show, the events organizer, microphone in hand, asked the assembled audience "Is there anyone here today from England?", and cheers went up from various sections of the crowd. "How many Scots are in the audience today?" he continued, receiving a loud roar in response. After ascertaining the composition of the audience, he explained that today's performance was set during the Scottish War of Independence, and that the audience should remember to 'support your own side'. A handsome silver-haired and bearded man in chainmail and surcoat then addressed the audience directly, without a microphone.⁶⁴ "Our land has been overrun by the English forces of the treacherous king known as Longshanks, Edward of England. Our noble lord Robert the Bruce needs brave warriors to free our land of these invaders - who is with me?"

The English (or '*Sassanach*', as one Highland re-enactment group refers to them, using Scottish Gaelic), often feature as the 'bogeyman' in historical performances set during the Wars of Independence, and much later, during the Jacobite risings. As Davies (1998:142) has written,

ritual may express conflict and a desire for cultural change rather than any celebration of the community as currently imagined or constituted, and in doing so it may involve outsiders, either actually present or as absent categorical referents... It is affected by the nature of the audience, both

⁶⁴ Re-enactors try to avoid microphones and project their voices through lung power alone.

the actual crowds who watch and those who are imagined
to be observing.

After the introduction, there were cheers from some sections of the audience, and from the company of re-enactors, who lined up in front of this 'knight' for inspection. At that point, however, there was a vignette in which a 'traitorous' Scottish knight stood forward in front of his own men-at-arms and declared his allegiance to Edward of England. The 'villain' of the piece, a darkly bearded man, was dressed in black in order to make clear, in true British 'panto' style, that he was not to be trusted. A young 'peasant boy' from the assembled 'villagers' called him 'a traitor', at which point the 'evil knight' 'slew' the unarmed and unarmoured boy. At this point the two 'knights' exchanged insults, a signal was given and a melee ensued. Again, in what seemed to be almost a nod to pantomime⁶⁵, audiences were encouraged to declare their own allegiances, and to 'boo' or cheer their own sides, during the conflict. I later discovered that this was a feature of most public re-enactments, at the beginning of which a speaker for the group would try to ascertain the nationality of audience members and form them into 'cheering sections' for the different factions of the upcoming battle. The outcome of the skirmish, of course, was never in doubt, and the silver-haired knight defeated and 'captured' the black knight, parading him in front of the audience and asking them to declare whether he should show mercy or execute the false knight. The audience, in true Roman coliseum style, declared their preference for blood, demanding the death of the black knight, who was summarily 'beheaded.'

The emphasis on entertainment in the performance described above does not negate its impact, however. Writing on the ludic and affective nature of puppet masquerade performance in Mali (1995:148), Arnoldi has noted that:

the performance offers the community repeated opportunities to negotiate and renegotiate group identities based on these histories, no matter how fleeting or broadly imagined these shared pasts may be defined... This historical license might well be explained by the

⁶⁵ The British tradition of pantomime, in which set character types repeat catch phrases and address audiences directly, encouraging them to interact with and respond to the performance, was unknown to me at this time, and remains largely a mystery.

fact that the dramatic representations of these different pasts are always fragmentary... performances are never intended to constitute any master narrative... Because the performances are defined as play and entertainment, they do not constitute any official chronicle about the past.

By defining performances as 'play', therefore, re-enactment may make persuasive commentaries about history and identity without risking the challenge which would face more overt declarations. According to Schechner, such performances are also an example of "restored behavior" (1982:43):

the event to be restored is either forgotten, never was, or is overlaid with other material, so much so that its historicity is irrelevant. What is recalled are earlier performances: history not being what happened but what is encoded and transmitted. Performance is not merely a selection from data arranged and interpreted; it is behavior itself and carries with it a kernel of originality, making it the subject for further interpretation, the source of further history.

The extent to which such public performances may be termed theatre or rite is sometimes difficult to define. Beeman (1993) argues that the key divisions between these types is the audience's observation of the former and participation in the latter, as well as the primary intention: entertainment or efficacy. Re-enactment events actively attempt to draw in the audience, hinting that they share characteristics with ritual. Moreover, as Davies (1998:141) argues of Welsh *eisteddfod* performances, "participants, and more particularly organizers, often regard them as having a serious purpose of collective representation".

Ironically, however, despite the potential 'seriousness' of intent, one of the techniques frequently used to draw in audiences at re-enactment events is humour. This may take the form of a bit of slapstick, or a risque remark addressed to the adults in the crowd, as when one knight looked on with mock annoyance as his 'squire' belatedly hustled from his tent, awkwardly bearing bits of armour: "Look at him, late again! I keep telling him lads his age shouldn't spend so much time polishing their helmets". Tuan argues that comedy serves to break down deferential distance between performer and audience:

“The audience laughs and laughter is active participation: what barrier may exist between performing space and spectator space is thus breached.” (1990:242).

After the battle portion of Ancient Ayrshire’s performance, the audience were allowed to enter the field, which had been roped off during the combat scenes, and explore the tents, examine the weapons and speak to the group members. When I asked about how they went about making their clothing, which seemed from close quarters more ‘evocative’ than strictly authentic, one member advised me that army surplus blankets made good material to cut up and make costumes with that right ‘rough feel’. I then approached a large - and inevitably, bearded, - man, and expressed my interest in studying re-enactors and re-enactment, and was introduced to their ‘educational director’, ‘Katrin’, who was called over to speak to me. One of the key women in the group, ‘Katrin’ gave me a brochure advertising school visits which mentioned several other historical periods which the group also portrayed, and stated that they could tailor performances to the school curriculum for the topics and periods being studied by each class. The fee for a school performance by the group was £30 pounds, to cover transportation, liability insurance and the cost of repairing equipment, which often needed to be replaced. Katrin told me that because of popular demand, she’d recently developed this pursuit into a part-time job, doing school visits three days a week, mostly around Ayrshire but also travelling up to Stirling and other areas.

While I was speaking to her, a near-tragic incident occurred. Prior to the show, one of the group members who was acting as ‘M.C.’ had asked parents in the audience, if they had very young children, to reassure them in advance that “no one was actually being killed - it’s just pretend”, so as not to upset them (a bit like the similar warning of Bottom’s troupe of ‘rude mechanical’ players in *Midsummer Nights’ Dream*). This well-intentioned warning backfired seriously, however, when during the hands-on ‘open’ session which followed, a young girl had picked up a spear leaning against a tree and, as she had seen done in the show, charged at one of the re-enactors with it. In fact, she was running straight at Katrin’s back with the spear outstretched, when I saw her and warned Katrin to move aside. At that point, another group member saw what had happened and

hurried over to remove the weapon from the girl (whose parents were nowhere to be seen).

Because of the blunted tip of the spear, and the fact that the child was too small to run quickly with it, it is unlikely that she could have done any serious damage, but it highlighted to me the dangers of 're-enacting' battles. The most obvious of these of course is the physical risk. But equally problematic is the danger entailed in claiming truth when 'recreating history'. All of the publicly-performing groups gave, as one of their primary reasons for pursuing their pastime, the justification that "people need to know the truth". To varying degrees, all felt that established sources - academics, historians, authors of books - had failed to achieve this goal, either because they had 'overlooked' Scotland, or actively 'ignored' its role in British history. Their performances, and the talks which accompanied them, were meant to address this gap. But while no re-enactor would privately claim that "this is exactly how it happened in 1296", their power over their audience - their claim on the public's attention - is precisely, in their own eyes, their possession of 'truth'. This knowledge capital (Bourdieu 1990) is devalued if the 'currency' is shown to be adulterated - thus, perhaps, the emphasis on 'authenticity' of knowledge and experience, and the contestation of others' possession of this truth, which are so pervasive an aspect of the re-enactment world.

The incident recounted above highlights the complexity of dealing with 'layers of truth'. It is perhaps unsurprising that a child might have difficulty with the paradox that "this show is just pretend - no one is being hurt" while at the same time "these weapons are real - they can kill someone". On several occasions during the 'walk-through' portion of the show which almost all public performers stage, I saw narrowly-avoided accidents of this nature. Often, to my surprise, parents seemed unable to discern these levels of truth - that an article that was 'not dangerous' in the hands of a trained adult re-enactor, such as a quiver of sharpened arrows, for example, was potentially lethal to a child. Unlike other weapons used by re-enactors, arrows used for target practice and demonstrations

are almost always sharp - and even 'blunted' arrows can be lethal if shot by a 30 pound bow.

'Knowing their place' - Performing the Local

I later came to know this group, 'Ancient Ayrshire', quite well. It focused on three separate historical periods, the Viking era, medieval Wars of Independence, and Covenanter periods, all portrayed through important battles of those times: Largs, Bannockburn, and Tippermuir. The group's founder, 'Derrick', later told me that he felt it was important that they be able to 'do' any period requested, as long as it had to do with local history. However, he volunteered the observation that "you can't really do them all accurately if you're going to try to do that many periods." For him there was a 'trade-off' in being able to answer the need for local events, festivals, and commemorations to include a historical performance, whatever the period. The acknowledgement of one's own history, rather than its strict recreation, was success enough⁶⁶.



Figure 45 - Ancient Ayrshire perform as Jacobites

⁶⁶ Inevitably, however, this group was criticized by others which specialized in a single period and looked down on the Ayrshire group's lack of commitment to authenticity in costume construction, etc. Unusually, though, the group were generally well-liked by almost all other troupes I met: perhaps because they did not aspire to the 'laurels' of 'most authentic group', and were therefore not seen as direct rivals.

The group was founded, I was told, on the 800th anniversary of the Battle of Largs, a victory against the Vikings which had occurred on the nearby coast.⁶⁷ Their involvement was thus very much in local history, as they had formed to commemorate such an event. They had also staged shows centered on the famous Kennedy family⁶⁸ of Culzean Castle, including the roasting of George Kennedy, (who I was told was at that time a bishop at Crossraguel Abbey), at Dunoon Castle; and the Covenanting struggles that took place in this region: Ayrshire was a great site of 'conventicles', open-air religious meetings. The associations with Robert the Bruce in the area of Girvan & Maybole, and at Tunberry, were also frequently mentioned in private conversations with group members. This emphasis on the local came up again and again, and a deep interest and pride in their own history, alongside a feeling that they had been as marginalised within Scottish history as Scotland had been within British history:

When tourists come to Scotland, they go to Edinburgh Castle
- that had naught to do wi' Robert the Bruce! Or Stirling -
he never lived there! He was born here, and so was Wallace!

When next I met the group, in August, they were performing a 'Viking' battle at Blackness Castle overlooking the Firth of Forth in Lothian, where Mel Gibson's 'Hamlet' was filmed. They had a 'Viking camp' which included a gruesome standard of a partial skeleton and a badger skin on a staff draped with a banner, which was erected in front of the largest tent. They later told me that these items had been given to them along with some other nice props to show appreciation for their participation in an episode of the Scottish detective drama *Taggart*, which featured a murder in a museum. The standard, then, acted as more than just 'set dressing', as it was a flamboyant reminder of their success, and recognition, in this popular programme.

⁶⁷ There was some disagreement over this - later I was told by another member that it was to commemorate the ancient district of Carrick's independence from Galloway.

⁶⁸ The Kennedys were descendants of the kings of Galloway, and later bore the title Earl of Carrick, which title eventually passed through marriage to the Bruces, and became the customary title of the eldest son of the Scottish king - equivalent to the English use of 'Prince of Wales'. See H. MacQueen (1998) on the Gaelic lords of Carrick.

In addition to this rather gory prop, however, they also had a small 'market', with a stand selling herbal remedies, made by a member who grew her own plants in a garden on Soulseat Loch near Stranraer. She had small vials and pots of ointments, creams and skin remedies, made from calendula, camomile, lavender and tea tree oil, which were available for sale to the audience before and after the main performance.

There were more women at this performance than the April one, and they had more central roles. Two of the women again performed as warriors in male costume; three other women were in rough homespun dresses. One of these was quite involved in the performance, as a captive English 'wench' who turned on her Viking overlords and poisoned one and stabbed the other. The lead male actors were 'acting macho' - seemingly their interpretation of the way Vikings treated women - although I believe not very accurate. They verbally and physically abused the women 'camp followers' to the boos of the crowd, and everyone cheered when they got their 'comeuppance'. The women thus had a lot more scenes, and significance, than in the earlier Bruce-era performance. I chatted to the women for awhile and overheard their leader, 'Derrick', a silver-haired man who had played the part of the Viking 'jarl', complain that the women had changed the performance without letting him know, and that an audience member had called him a 'wife-beater'. He seemed to have mixed feelings that his performance had been found so convincing.

I saw this friendly group perform their third and final historic period, the Covenanters, at St. Andrews Castle in late August of that year. They staged the Battle of Tippermuir, in which James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, had defeated the Covenanters' force. I approached and greeted those I recognized, but was disappointed at the vague smiles in response, which seemed to indicate they didn't remember me. I moved over to one side of the roped-off area, where two women from the group were talking. One was still dressed in ordinary street clothing, and the other, whom I recognized from the Blackness Castle 'Viking' re-enactment, was in the same black cloak, though now over Civil War period finery. After pulling out photographs from Blackness to show them, I was soon surrounded by group members, one or two of whom said, 'oh, I remember you now!'

The group enjoyed seeing photos of themselves, and this seemed to prove my real interest in them, especially after I mentioned the shared experiences of the horrid weather on the day of their Easter performance.

An older woman audience member, who had arrived early for the show along with a friend, began talking to me about her enjoyment of historical re-enactments in general. During the conversation, a bystander mentioned the film *Braveheart*, critically comparing the Hollywood interpretation of the exploits of William Wallace and Robert the Bruce⁶⁹ with the re-enactment performance at St. Andrews - on the site, as she felt, of real events, researched and acted by real Scots. I expected that the two well-dressed elderly ladies might agree, and deride the Americanized, celluloid rendition of their own history, but instead the first lady surprised me by saying how much she'd liked the film, stating with obvious pride and satisfaction, "Aye, but if it weren't for that movie we wouldn't have had our Referendum". The 'Yes / Yes' campaign, which had resulted in an overwhelming vote for a devolved Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers, was partially fueled, she seemed to feel, by the nationalistic sentiment inspired, ironically, by a foreign-produced epic filmed in Ireland!

Another audience member, a bearded visiting archeologist in a bright lime green shirt, later approached the re-enactors to tell them that some aspect of their show had been historically inaccurate - to their amusement and annoyance. It seemed, one of the re-enactors subsequently informed me with some disdain, this man claimed to have participated in digs on battlefield sites. Another re-enactor, overhearing this, then told me a story:

a mate of mine c'n find more metal material - y'know, buttons, bullet shells, buckles - than any archeologist, because he knows a secret they don't - metal gets pushed *up* and out of the soil over the years, see, by earth worms. Soft stuff decays, gets burrowed through, and compacted down, but the metal is rejected by the busy creatures and gets churned up - so it's found at higher levels, deposits, than the things it was originally buried with.

⁶⁹ See M. Ash (1990) for the significance throughout Scotland, and to Scots abroad, of the 'myth cycle' of these two culture heroes.

I found this fascinating - but I couldn't help but feel that if this man's friend knew this, but professional archeologists didn't, it was even more remarkable. What seemed significant is that re-enactors clearly feel compelled to question 'received wisdom', and to assert their own knowledge in the face of those who are generally considered to be the experts. I felt that I'd been 'taken into the ranks' by the man who shared this story. Re-enactors seem to see themselves as *amateurs*, but only in the original French meaning of the term, as a true 'lover' of a subject, as opposed to a professional who may claim authority merely to profit by it. At the end of this anecdote, another group member who'd been standing listening to the other 'put down' archaeologists, then put in "oh, that's her dad, by the way", nodding from me towards the bearded archaeologist at a distance. We both enjoyed the momentary look of discomfort on the face of my informant until he realized his friend was joking - again, I felt I was on the "inside" of this joke.

Prior to the first of the days' shows, 'Duncan', the performer playing the Marquis of Montrose, arrived and strode over to the growing crowd around the periphery, where two young boys were sitting behind the rope barrier. In a thick Scottish brogue, menacing them with his sword, he asked:

"Where are ye from?"

When there was no reply, he added,

"Are ye Scottish"?

One of them backed away, seemingly scared, while the other replied in a small voice, "yes".

"Well, I want you to cheer for me, or I'll hang you from that bracket on the wall over there" (all the while threatening the boy with his sword).

He then approached a young girl.

"Where are ye from? Are ye Scottish"?

"No", she replied in a small voice.

"Are ye *English*"? he asked, threateningly.

"No, I'm American" she replied.

"Are you just visiting on holiday, then"?

It was interesting that he stepped out of character when confronted by an American. Perhaps, in the mind of many Scots, Americans cannot be associated with history, but only with tourism.⁷⁰

Prior to the performance one of the group members stepped forward to act as narrator, or ‘M.C.’ for the day’s enactment, explaining that Montrose had been a supporter of the Protestant Covenanters, but had turned against them when they became increasingly intolerant after the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant in 1644. Thus, within the bounds of that day’s performance, Montrose was clearly set up as “the good guy”; in modern terms, the ‘politically correct’ man who fights for freedom of belief. Despite the fact that Tippermuir was a conflict between Scottish factions, as much based on clan allegiance as on sectarian or political beliefs, the ‘Marquis’ was still attempting to involve audience members along nationalist lines, however. Again, popular nationalist sentiment I sometimes heard expressed among the groups declared that as Montrose’s opponent, Archibald Campbell, Marquis of Argyll, was supporting the English parliament against the Stuart monarch Charles I, that this phase of the Civil Wars *was* an ‘English v. Scottish’ conflict. The same people might argue at another time, however, that it was the Scots who had originally taken arms against the king because of his attempt to force an Anglican, or Episcopalian, type of church service on them: again, this conflict is portrayed as an example of Scottish resistance against English cultural oppression. Discussing the back-and-forth nature of Scottish involvement in the Civil Wars, I once told a history-buff re-enactor: “Now I think I know what the word ‘thrawn’ means” (a Scots term, which they frequently applied to themselves, meaning ‘stubborn and contrary’).

Again, a scary episode occurred, this time during a dramatic moment in the performance. The troupe leader, Derrick (fighting on the Royalist’s side) fired a musket at the retreating Covenanter troops, and it went off with what seemed an unusually loud bang, startling the audience. This was the only time a musket was used, and I thought the

⁷⁰ At least that has often been my own experience when, after talking with a stranger at some length about local issues and living in Scotland, I am asked “So, how long are you visiting?”

'special effects' had been a little excessive. After the performance was over, while I was chatting with 'Montrose', 'Derrick' came over and showed the two of us the burst muzzle of the gun, shards of metal curled outwards. It had exploded, but fortunately only on the barrel end, and he was uninjured. I was then told that another older male member had lost some fingers to a similar incident some years earlier. This man had played 'Bloodaxe' in the earlier Viking re-enactment, and I'd noticed the missing digits, but thought it had been a birth defect or something of that sort, assuming that if it had been a sword-fighting accident, he'd have given up on 'living' history for good. Injuries seem to be part of the enterprise, however; 'Montrose' also had his hand cut by a sword during this day's performance, although he seemed not to have noticed it as it was only bleeding slightly.

My partner, Peter, asked some of the men how they'd learned sword play, and they said they practiced only once a week, and offered to show him 4 basic moves. They explained that two more are 'tacked on' after these first four are acquired, and that in combination these 6 moves were recombined to produce full-scale fight scenes. What surprised me was not the ease with which simple sword techniques were learned and passed on, but the ease, even eagerness, with which Peter - who had come along to the event under duress - fell into the role of novice soldier, and his clear enjoyment of it.⁷¹ This was perhaps the first time I witnessed the 'enchantment of the sword' - the spell this object casts over grown men (and women). This spell has little to do with Merlin, Excalibur or the Lady of the Lake; although immersed in myth and fantasy it is real. It derives its power, I believe, from childhood games of slaying giants and dragons and swashbuckling on the high seas.⁷² Several of the re-enactors I met admitted to feeling

⁷¹ Prior to my fieldwork, my partner, who describes himself as 'typical west of Scotland working class', had expressed disparaging views of re-enactors, suspecting they were 'poncy upper-class dodgy right-wingers'. After meeting many of them, he discovered shared political beliefs and participation in several campaigns - anti-poll tax, anti-racism - in which he had also been involved, and revised his opinion. (*i.e., poncy=effeminate; dodgy=untrustworthy, suspicious.)

⁷² I believe such games may be common to cultures in which the sword held an iconic status as an emblem of high prestige, as in the hierarchical, warrior-based societies of medieval Europe and Japan. I have witnessed Japanese, European and Anglo-American children engaged in imaginary fencing duels, with factory-made plastic swords or found objects such as sticks - most recently after visiting a re-enactment event at a stately home on the outskirts of Glasgow.

‘silly’ initially upon encountering, and joining, re-enactors at play, but then described becoming ‘converted’ after their first experience of putting on the ‘garb’ and handling a sword.

After this performance I was invited to travel to Girvan in south Ayrshire to stay with one of the members and observe the group’s combat practice session. Because the combat practice was a ‘private’ event held in the grounds of a school where one of the group members was employed, I took advantage of the absence of a public audience to conduct formal interviews. Compressed highlights of these follow in the next section.

Behind the Battle Lines: Interviews with ‘Ancient Ayrshire’

‘Tam’:

I wanted to learn to fight, that’s how I originally got involved. But what actually made me search it out was being made redundant, and it made me look for something else in life, apart from just work. And from that, I joined up, to learn to fight with swords. And when I joined up, I discovered it wasn’t just swords, there was more to it. I had to know about history, be able to interact with the people that you were entertaining as well, and from there it gradually moved on to having a go at making a costume, because we were at the very start of [enactment], we were still quite young yet. And from there I progressed to becoming a costumer, not one of the best, but, a costumer... I enjoy everything we do, but my favorite period has to be the Covenant period, because the costumes are far more ornate, more interesting to make... I’ve done a bit o’ Tudor, one o’ my first attempts, I made a Tudor costume by accident when I was tryin’ to make a Covenant costume [laughs]. Because, the length of the bodice in the jacket, in the Covenant period it’s very high up; in the Tudor period it’s low down on the waist... At first, I wasn’t really into the history, I thought I would be able to have fun, right, and leave the talk to other people. But to be able to pick up on the crowd that you’re entertainin’, to be able to enjoy more of the work that goes into it, it does help to know a bit o’ history. You can’t help but pick up on it as you go along anyway, going to the councils [group meetings]... It’s all interestin’, especially if ya can get both sides o’ the argument... it helps to put in the politics, etcetera... I think I woulda been a Royalist, but that’s because o’ my own upbringing’... but it’s difficult to say - it depended on your political feelings of the time. Like today, really.

‘Ewan’:

When I was about 16, my brother joined the Sealed Knot. And I was too young to join, but I joined anyway, and started out as a pikeman. And spent about two and a half years either as a Jacobite Scot or a pikeman for the Civil War. And then really gave it up. But although I still did history at university, and then went on and played war games and did all sorts of things historical, but really had pretty much given up on the historical re-enactment, until about 2 years ago when we saw ‘Ancient Ayrshire’ at an event and went and spoke to Derrick and that was it. My sons joined in - that’s Richard and Angus [pointing out two large lads] - I don’t think I could stop them. The idea of using swords and axes and shields and spears really appealed to them. The problem would’ve been stopping them - they’ve been, you know, firing arrows and hitting things with plastic swords all their lives, so... The history’s more important to me. I quite enjoy doing the re-enactment, but I’m not really particularly interested in the actual fighting as such. One of the things I study is military history, and I’ve got probably one of the best libraries of military history books in this area of Scotland anyway - it certainly outclasses any of the libraries around! There are people [in the group] who know various bits and pieces better than me, ‘Katrin’ for instance on the Jacobites and that sort of period - we don’t really go there, but we can if we have to. But I prefer the medieval period to the Dark Ages. But the problem with history is every time you read another book you find out that the last book that you read was telling a few lies. And if you watch *Braveheart*, you realise... [laughs] - make sure you’ve read a few books first... In the Dark Ages, there’s maybe half a dozen reasonable sources for what went on, and other than that you’re really looking at archeology, and archaeological finds are notorious for people not really interpreting things as they really are, until they get something else to tie it into. Especially, you know, in the Dark Ages, they find items, and say they’re one thing, and it turns out that what was supposed to be a piece of armour is part of horse furniture instead... or part of a chair! ... I wouldn’t do anything from the 20th century, I think - up to the Zulu Wars. I don’t think I’d even approve of the Boer War... I think that’s the point where warfare became too serious, mass warfare - I mean, even the American Civil War, it was mass warfare, but there was still a bit of... there were still a few gentlemen around, there was still a place for people to actually think about what they were doing, believe in what they were doing; both sides were there because they wanted to be. Since then, it’s gone to the stage where the armies are formed of people who were conscripted into fighting, and may actually be opposed to the policies they’re fighting for. But they don’t really have much choice, because

if they're fighting for their country, their country's going to be overrun by other conscripts, so... and the weapons used nowadays are grossly unfair as well... There was something in the old days, if you wanted to get involved in a fight, you had to see your enemy face to face - well, you might shoot him with an arrow at long range, I guess, quite a lot of them did - but I think in the 20th century it has got to the phase where the weapons are unfair, you're shooting at people who don't really have a chance - flamethrowers, napalm, all these sorts of weapons are real - they've brought warfare into disrepute. The soldier as a career is no longer an honourable profession, really.

'Duncan' / 'Marquis of Montrose':

I got involved in re-enactment, it was really through my father - he was quite a good local historian, well-known around here - he brought me up to have a strong interest in history. He was one of those kind of people who just - everything was history with him all the time. You'd be driving around with him and he'd just say, 'okay, that's where that battle took place, and that happened'. And he was one of the ones that actually got 'Ancient Ayrshire' started, at this big event, at Culzean Castle, and one of the features of it was they had re-enactment. And it was funny, 'cause here were these people in fancy period dress, and I had, uh, a t-shirt sprayed silver and cardboard armour on over it! But uh, after that I made sure to get the real authentic stuff. And when we were first practicing swordfighting, we used German sabers - with edges on them! You couldn't get re-enactment swords back then... I hate it when history is done just for entertainment, and fictional characters get thrown in, or people who weren't actually there at that scene at that time. But I love being the Marquis of Montrose - I love the Covenant period. If I couldn't do Covenant stuff I wouldn't want to do re-enactment. The clothing's much more elegant, the weapons. I hate doing Viking - it's like, rough wool, fur - oh god, I've got to wear that bloody gear!

'Katrin':

Well, I got involved - basically I was set up on a blind date with one of the members - he was really involved in the combat side - so I came along, and fancied the group - didn't really fancy the guy, but I've been involved with 'Ancient Ayrshire' ever since; I think that's about 1994. It was the time when '*Braveheart*' came out and I was able to go up after having just met some of the group and see some of the filming up north and it was very exciting... [pointing out the window] See that tower? We call it the Stumpy ... that's where Robert the Bruce had the Courts of Justice - the

Parliament. It wasn't in one place, in Edinburgh, then - it moved around the country... The history element's the most important to me - that's why I do 'History Alive in Schools' [school presentations]. I cover whatever they're doing in class, everything from the Mesolithic period in Girvan, the stone chips left behind by those people, the shell middens - and Viking, Celtic, right up through medieval, Covenanter, Jacobite. I put a lot into researching the different periods, and I get letters and comments back from the schools, and the students, about how much they enjoyed it, how much they learned. That makes it worth it. It's the education, really... But Tam and Duncan and I are going to take fencing lessons this year - there's a class being offered here in Girvan - to keep up our rapier skills. It's quite different to the broadswords we use for earlier periods... I like the later periods, Jacobite especially...

'Viking Dave':

Yeah, before I met these guys [in 'Ancient Ayrshire'], I started out with 'Regia Anglorum' - it means 'the kingdom of England' - but they've got 3 kingdoms in Scotland. You can only recruit within your own geographical boundaries - just like in historic times. I think the Edinburgh group - a guy named 'Jamie' runs it - they've only got 3 members now. I know that guy 'Gunnar' you were talking about in Edinburgh; he used to be in Regia. Everybody's heard of him. I've only actually met him twice, so I wouldn't expect he'd remember me, though... My group in Glasgow, we had 6 members, but now I've moved down to Girvan I've gotten involved with Ancient Ayrshire. There's another [Regia] 'kingdom' down in the Borders somewhere, I think they've got about 20 members. About a quarter of them are women - but we didn't have any women in our group, and there aren't any in Edinburgh... but as a whole, Regia, it's, I'd say, about fifty-fifty. They always have a living history⁷³ as well as a battle element... We always have encampments, and weapons are banned in camp. You have to leave them in the armoury outside... We had great times in the camps... There was this one guy, 'Uncle Vicious' - big huge guy, over six feet tall, long black beard - a scary guy but a great guy. So one time this biker asks his daughter out, and Uncle Vicious just gives him a look: 'okay, but have her back before ten o'clock or you'll be answering to me'. So at about half nine there's this big scuffle outside the tents,

⁷³ Several re-enactors told me that the 'living history' facet of their performances, which usually feature a marketplace or camp life, has grown over the years as more women have become involved.

the sound of a girl screaming and yelling, and the biker appears, 'n he's dragging the girl back to her dad's tent. She didn't want to go, but he was making sure he didn't miss the deadline... [chuckle] Yeah, Uncle Vicious was great. I hear he's a Tabbie⁷⁴ now, or down in the Borders with the Reivers... But you know, it was Regia - have you heard of the Vikingar⁷⁵ centre? It was Regia who did the film for that. They've got this big wraparound screen. It's very good, it's well-presented, good exhibits. But the gift shop! - you go into this gift shop, and in there, they've got these plastic helmets for kids - with horns! - which totally undermines what we're trying to teach people, that, you know, the Vikings DIDN'T wear horns on their helmets, for one thing. They came over as merchants, as traders and settlers. Only at particular historical periods - due to environmental factors, economic contingencies - did they also do raiding. But of course, since everything was written down by monks, and they were raided - well, the story builds up. And the story's only told from the perspective of these Christian monks who wrote it down...

You were asking about the history of Regia... We formed, initially to do the Saxons, to cover a period from about 950 to 1066, then that's the Norman invasion - that was pretty much our speciality. And we began to extend this when we were asked to do this event connected with the Battle of Largs. So we were offered this gig in Largs, and Rob, he was in charge, didn't want to do it. So he named an outlandish price, you know, he was sure they wouldn't pay. But they came back and they said, "Okay we'll pay you that". So then he was like, stuck, didn't know what to do, n' thought, 'right, we've gotta do this show now.' So we just sort of slapdashed some kit together... but people seemed quite happy with it - I guess it was as good as they'd expected, or maybe better. So we felt like, well, if we're gonna do this period, we'd better get it right, we'd better get some correct dress. So we worked on it. Now there're some members who do a period a bit earlier than 950, I think they're doing circa 800 or so, trying to get into the pagan Saxon era. So we're covering a wide range of periods now.

⁷⁴ 'Viking Dave' was unsure how this nickname originated - the full name of the of the group was Cumbric or Gaelic, he thought, and the acronym, made up of the initial letters of the group name, were TAB. They were Viking Russ - Vikings of the Russian steppes - and wore full-skirted woollen riding tunics and fur-trimmed Cossack-style hats, which made them resemble cats; thus, 'tabbies'.

⁷⁵ A heritage centre interpreting the Viking presence in Scotland.

Trouble in the ranks

Despite the seeming camaraderie and dedication of this group, rumbles of mutiny were sometimes heard. After observing a combat practice session with Ancient Ayrshire one evening, we adjourned to a pub, where there was much talk about the schisms both within and between groups. A lot of the conversation was 'gossip' concerning group members, and some of the problems within the group itself: who's no longer dating who, who's been kicked out, who's been 'getting on a bit better than they probably should be' with other people. It struck me that some of these schismatic divides were similar to those encountered in 'intentional communities' or religious sects which form around charismatic leaders.

Some 'A.A.' members felt that their leader had become too dominant, trying to control all aspects of the group's performance and not allowing enough input from other group members. Several individuals were unhappy about this and moreover didn't like the direction of some of the shows. They felt there was too much emphasis on fictional characters and too many playacting scenes featuring a couple of new members. This wasn't the direction that they wanted to take - they felt there was 'too much drama, not enough battle'. They were historical re-enactors, not actors - the latter group were frequently criticized by re-enactors.⁷⁶

Another source of conflict was that a former member, 'Hugo', had gotten some film work for a fellow A.A. member without first consulting the group's leader. My informant explained that Hugo had been approached by film-makers who were looking for a particular type of person to portray William Wallace. The producers wanted

⁷⁶ Actors are perceived to be both 'snooty' and ill-informed. During the Tantallon Castle event, for example, Glasgael members had invited the visiting 'Knights of Royal England' to join them for a drink with the other re-enactors, but were rebuffed - as Gwen reported, 'They said they're ACTORS, not re-enactors'. Another tale was told of some re-enactors who had gotten work on a film featuring a British actor famous for his booming voice, beard, and girth. Angered after another retake, the actor reportedly threw down his weapon, narrowly missing a re-enactor. The offended 'soldier', the tale went, approached the star, his hand on sword hilt, and said 'You'll treat both me and your weapon with more respect in future'. Another source of the actor / re-enactor conflict, however, is that the latter are generally unable to acquire Equity cards, or membership in the acting and stage performers' union.

someone 'tall and red haired', and who was a good fighter. And Hugo recommended someone who was with Ancient Ayrshire at that time. However, the group's leader, Derrick, felt that things were being taken out of his charge, and feared that perhaps Hugo was trying to undermine A.A. He believed Hugo might intend to take people away and start his own group, or was out to make money for himself personally, and was very unhappy about this. In the end, several of the A.A. members followed their leader in agreeing that Hugo was disruptive and should leave the group. Another contingent, however, felt that this wasn't true, that the banished member had actually been trying to expand things, and get more work for the group. This 'faction' felt that they'd lost a very good member. Ironically, the very thing their leader, Derrick, feared, came to pass, because after leaving A.A. under a cloud, Hugo did form his own, now successful, group, which appears frequently in the Historic Scotland events programme. He did, however, remain friends with many members of A.A., and on a Father's Day show at the ruined Crossraguel Abbey in Ayrshire (another freezing cold and wet June day) he came down to see their Covenanter show, and spoke with me after it. He did not directly address his reasons for leaving the group, and at first implied that travelling from Kilmarnock to the group's practices had become too tiring (although I know of many re-enactors who travel much greater distances, not only for shows but for weekly practice sessions and social activities). But then he added that he wasn't very interested in the Covenanter period and had wanted to do more medieval stuff - and told me he had formed his own group, 'The Forged Sword'. His primary reason was a desire to concentrate on combat:

Hugo: I wanted to do more of that *brutal* hack-and-slash kind of stuff.
We boys like to - some of us boys like to get into the real *mmm* [grunt].

It seemed Hugo felt that the martial element of A.A.'s recent shows was not "up to snuff", or not challenging enough. He wanted to concentrate on this aspect, and so formed his own troop. The new group's name also implied that this was their main concentration. Many such re-enactment groups originally form primarily in order to practice with historic weapons. Only later do they move to staging large-scale combat events. One frequent area of contestation is the extent to which groups have 'progressed'

by fleshing out their performances with non-combat, 'living history' elements, or in contrast 'stayed true' to their roots and continued an emphasis on martial arts. Along with leadership contests, this continues to be a source of conflict and schism among many groups.



Figure 46 - a typical camp meal

Public Performances

Chapter Eight: 'Glasgael' - Entering the Tent

Performance is also concerned with something that anthropologists have always found hard to characterize theoretically: the creation of presence. Performances, whether ritual or dramatic, create and make present realities vivid enough to beguile, amuse, or terrify. And through these presences, they alter moods, social relations, bodily dispositions and states of mind. (Schieffelin 1998:194)

On Robbie Burns Day⁷⁷ - January 25th, 1999 - I received a phone call from Alec Girrard, the leader of one of the major re-enactment groups working in the west of Scotland, which I will call 'Glasgael'. He invited me "to attend a gathering at Castle Girrard" - in reality his flat in Port Glasgow - for an informal AGM to introduce new members to the group and plan and discuss the upcoming performance season which would begin that following spring. 'Castle Girrard' turned out to be a top-floor flat looking out over the Firth of Clyde. An impressive array of helmets was assembled along the floor on one wall, and there were racks of hand-made costumes of different periods, scraps of other articles of half-finished clothing strewn around in the process of being made, and spears leaning against the wall. This was a typical true re-enactor's abode.

Alec had received the group's schedule of performances from Historic Scotland (their major sponsor, and the chief organizer of re-enactment events in Scotland). He mentioned that "we've been cut back by one show this year, but they are paying us more

⁷⁷ The birth of 'Scotland's bard', the national poet Robert Burns, is celebrated in Scotland and by Scots expats and those of Scottish descent abroad by 'Burns Suppers', interesting rituals in which a traditional meal of haggis (sheep's stomach stuffed with minced tripe and oats), 'neeps' (mashed turnips) and 'tatties' (potatoes) are served to the accompaniment of bagpipe music, a 'dram' of whisky, speeches, and the recitation of Burn's poem "An Ode to the Haggis".

per show". He said that they'd been lucky, as he'd received a call from friends in an English Border Reivers troupe who often travelled to Scotland to perform, who were dismayed to discover that they were not included at all in that year's events schedule. Alec also told the members present that he would be concentrating more in future on one-man shows, or two-man shows along with his second-in-command, Murray. These of course were much easier to organize, and cheaper to fund, than full-scale re-enactments, and were suitable for some of the smaller Historic Scotland venues in properties such as Craigmillar Castle on the outskirts of Edinburgh, and at Linlithgow and Dollar Castles.



Figure 47 - Glasgael's campsite

In looking over the schedule, he noted that the 'big event' for the year, the Siege of Caerlaverock Castle which would be held to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the historic siege by Edward I of England on the Maxwells' stronghold, had been scheduled for the weekend of the 7th, 8th & 9th of July. He felt this was a mistake on the organizers' part, as that was also the weekend of the Tewksbury encampment in England, a sort of 'mecca' of re-enactors who travel from all over Britain and farther

afield to participate in this annual occasion. Tewksbury is massively popular among re-enactors, many of whom attend every year. Alec feared that many of the re-enactors who would have participated in the Caerlaverock show would be instead attending Tewksbury, creating a shortage of fighters for the former. The actual number of forces at the original siege was 3000 English soldiers vs 60 Scottish garrisoners under the command of Lady Maxwell (as Lord Maxwell himself was in an English prison at the time). The Maxwells' force held out for 30 days, before finally marching out of the castle to surrender. According to Alec, the besiegers, under Edward I and his son (later Edward II), were amazed when they saw how few defenders there had been. The captain of the garrison was hanged, but, Alec said, "history is unclear as to the fate of the soldiers." A French poet had been observing the battle, and his account - which Alec speculated may have been romanticised - claimed that all the soldiers were given winter coats and allowed to march free - though Alec expressed doubts as to this generosity on the part of the man known as 'The Hammer of the Scots', who saw the garrison as rebels, not enemy soldiers, "and would have treated them as such - after all, he saw himself as King of Scotland". He told us that prison records of the time from Hexham record the presence of "prisoners from Caerlaverock", so at least some of the garrison must have been incarcerated.

One of the interesting aspects about studying the life of re-enactors is that they would frequently break into such lengthy, and detailed, asides when discussing other matters. I was always amazed both at the depth of their knowledge, and at their passion about events which had taken place so long ago.

Returning to the matter at hand, Alec speculated that the possible shortage of fighters for the Caerlaverock Siege re-enactment might result in "word being passed around by Chinese whispers - some dodgy fighters, you know, undesirable types, might try to join in. This kind of event tends to attract those kind." All the re-enactment groups I encountered - Ancient Ayrshire, Glasgael, The Realm - mentioned problems with 'policing' their ranks against people who got into re-enactment 'for the wrong reasons'. Katrin, of Ancient Ayrshire, pointed out a young man who had appeared frequently in

old photographs of the group. "He was a great fighter", she told me - "but he was bad news. He didn't get it - he didn't try to pull his blows. We had to get rid of him - somebody was going to get hurt." She told me that he had later become involved in kickboxing, and had gone on to represent Scotland internationally in that sport.

Alec told a similar story: "There was an event a few years back, a guy called 'The Saracen' cracked open his opponent's head. It was only protected by a hardened leather helmet. Fragments of skull penetrated his brain. We don't want someone like that getting in. Problem is, I only know the guy by his nickname, and reputation. I wouldn't know him if he joined under a different name". Alec then admitted that he felt pretty desperate about the chances of producing a good turn-out of fighters for the Caerlaverock event, and that he'd considered approaching the Sealed Knot, who specialize in a much later period, the Civil War, to see if they might agree to supply some fighters. He said he would put together a 'kit guide' to help those unfamiliar with the period get together the appropriate kit.

At this point Gwen began to reminisce about earlier Tewksbury events she had attended. She explained to me that:

It's a War of the Roses event - there's about 2000 re-enactors that go every year. There's an 'authentic camp' that's open to the public to observe, and buy things, and a separate regular camping site - that's only open to the re-enactors. The battle is HUGE! You can't really see anything though unless you're actually in the battlefield - you know, Tewksbury is for the re-enactors really, more than the public. I was an archer one year; the other times I was a water carrier. That's very important, you know, in summer shows - you've gotta bring out water to the combatants to make sure they're not overheating. I didn't go this last year, though. It used to be a regular Glasgael event - we'd all go down- for about 5 years. But then one year Alec had to back out, and that left me to organize everything, the driving, pick everyone up, the whole 9-hour drive there, and I just said forget it. So I hired a car and just went on my own, just a holiday for me. I'm not going to try to organize the trip for everyone else. Anyway, it's a pretty tough camping scene, not everyone can handle it. There's no facilities - well, there are 'Portaloos' - about 50 for 2000 re-enactors! But no other

facilities - no running water, nothing to clean your hands with or wash up with or anything. And I'm just not going to bring people down there if they can't handle it, unless they've actually done some rough camping.... you know what I was thinking, next time I go? They've got everything there, lepers and prostitutes and... they've got these women that were prostitutes, with pock marks on their faces and everything. And that's what I'm going to do next time - I'm going to go as a medieval prostitute, all poxy!

What was particularly interesting to me was Gwen's warm memories about an event which, for someone such as myself unaccustomed to 'rough camping' in a cold country, sounded rather gruelling.

Avoch Rising - the preparations begin

The other important item on the agenda was a show that the group had been approached to participate in in Avoch, a village on the Black Isle north of Inverness. This was an annual event which had been started 2 years earlier in order to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the raising of the Scottish standard by Andrew de Moray, who fought alongside William Wallace at the Battle of Stirling Brig. Glasgael had been contracted to do a medieval costume display and lead the town procession to Ormonde Hill, where a replica of the standard would be raised on the site where locals believed de Moray had first begun what became known as 'the North Rising'. Gwen had written a script for the event in which de Moray (who would be played by Alec) confronts the English commander of the local castle, with the support of local villagers, before raising the flag.

One of the established members, 'Patrick', who was acknowledged as that rare thing, a good fighter as well as a good performer, was expected to take on the role of 'evil English garrison commander'. However, Patrick said that he would not be able to participate in that event, nor in many that season, as his new job required him to work on weekends. When he was asked if his friend 'Davie' would be joining as usual, it emerged that due to 'family commitments', he would no longer be participating: it seemed Davie had met another woman at a re-enactment, and left his wife for her. In revenge, the wife had insisted that Davie take their children every weekend - thus

putting an effective end to his re-enactment hobby. Gwen expressed concern that the group would not be able to meet its obligation to the organizers of the Avoch event, and especially wondered “where can we find someone who can do an English accent for the part of the garrison captain?”

At that point I took a big risk - both from the point of view of a re-enactor, and of an ethnographer - and decided to intervene. I mentioned, hesitantly, that I knew several re-enactors in Edinburgh, one of whom (the man I have called here ‘Gunnar’) was, I believed, quite a good swordfighter, very accurate when it came to period authenticity - and was actually English, so could be relied upon for a convincing accent. I knew that this was a big risk because I was aware of the strong animosity that existed between so many groups, and that I was in danger of antagonizing both sets of informants if either group took a dislike to the other. Word-of-mouth reputation was also important among re-enactors, and it was possible that Alec had heard of ‘Gunnar’ - possibly under another persona name - and would object to his involvement.

However, I was lucky - Alec had indeed heard of Gunnar, and had heard good things about him, both as a person and as a fighter. I rang up Gunnar and, after explaining the situation, the two group leaders spoke together over the phone. As it turned out, it was a profitable introduction for both sides. Gunnar, along with his wife Ragnhild and their daughters, not only participated in the Avoch event, but brought along more ‘warriors’ for future Glasgael performances in the east and central belt of Scotland, at Tantallon Castle and Dunfermline Abbey. They also eventually ‘swapped’ members, Gunnar introducing a young fighter who was keen on public performance to Alec’s group, and Glasgael passing on an eager re-enactor from Australia who was looking for re-enactors in Edinburgh interested in banqueting and the social arts as well as combat. I was pleased that I had made the contact, and in some small way proved useful to the people who had been so generous to me. Later that year, I joined Glasgael, and members of Gunnar’s household, in participating in the much-vaunted Siege of Caerlaverock, and describe my own experiences below.



Caerlaverock Castle - sometime in the late middle ages...

During a large-scale re-enactment commemorating the 700th anniversary of the siege of this famous Border castle, I spent the day spent in firing arrows at the wooden palisade which re-enactors had erected around the castle. We watched reconstructed giant catapults lob projectiles (which were actually balloons filled with water to simulate skins of oil which could be shot into a fortification and then set on fire with flaming arrows) at the walls, while others with siege ladders attempted to scale them. Many of the over 200 re-enactors arrived on the Friday night to begin preparations for the siege and encampment. An 'authentic' camp with medieval canvas tents had been set up within sight of the castle walls - and the audience. A second camp, made up of modern nylon tents, lay further away near the car park. I stayed in the former, in Glasgael's round canvas bell tent, while other group members slept in the knight's round pavilion.



Figure 48 - the ethnographer as archer

At the end of the first day's 'siege', we had enjoyed a good meal, a stew of vegetables and chicken meat cooked in a large iron cauldron over the fire, and good bread to mop up our wooden bowls. Wine had been drunk from pottery or wooden goblets, in copious quantities. Fortunately the event organizers had left us access to some toilets nearby, and although we did not have the modern extravagance of hot water these were luxury enough. There was no electricity, but so far from any town or city, the starlight was brilliant enough to light the way clearly. On the following day we would once more rise early, don again our damp heavy clothes which had been hung during the night to air out, build a fire to cook our breakfast - and then the crowds would arrive, and the 'assault' on the castle begin again.



Figure 49 - Caerlaverock camp, early morning

Some of my most vivid memories are of the penetrating cold and damp of re-enactment camps. To have only one woollen dress and a linen shift, sodden after a day's rain, to sleep in while wrapped in blankets on the ground, is difficult. To know that one will be wearing it again for the next several days, and that there is no access to either soap or hot

water, is to begin to experience something of the reality of medieval life quite separate from any romantic notions I may once have harboured. Handmade leather shoes, I discovered, no matter how finely stitched, always seemed to be soaked through, and have no traction on grass slicked with dew, nor do they offer much protection from protruding pebbles in muddy roads.

At the end of the long day's performances, the hardier revellers were still celebrating and socializing in a large rectangular pavilion tent a few feet away from the bell tent where I tried to sleep. Across the darkened field, candles inside the pavilion lit it up with a yellow glow. I was exhausted after the day's events, however, and even the noise, and the chill of the sodden grass beneath me, could not keep me awake long. I piled a few of the men's 'aketon' arming jackets beneath me for padding and insulation; this area around Caerlaverock Castle is still a low-lying swampland along the Solway Firth, which formed part of the castle's natural defences. The 'aketons', sometimes called 'gambesons', are heavy linen canvas-like jackets padded with rags, sheep's wool, straw, or any other available material, and not only provided protection in battle essential to both foot soldier and knight, but good protection as well from some of the creepy crawlies that oozed up from the ground during the night.

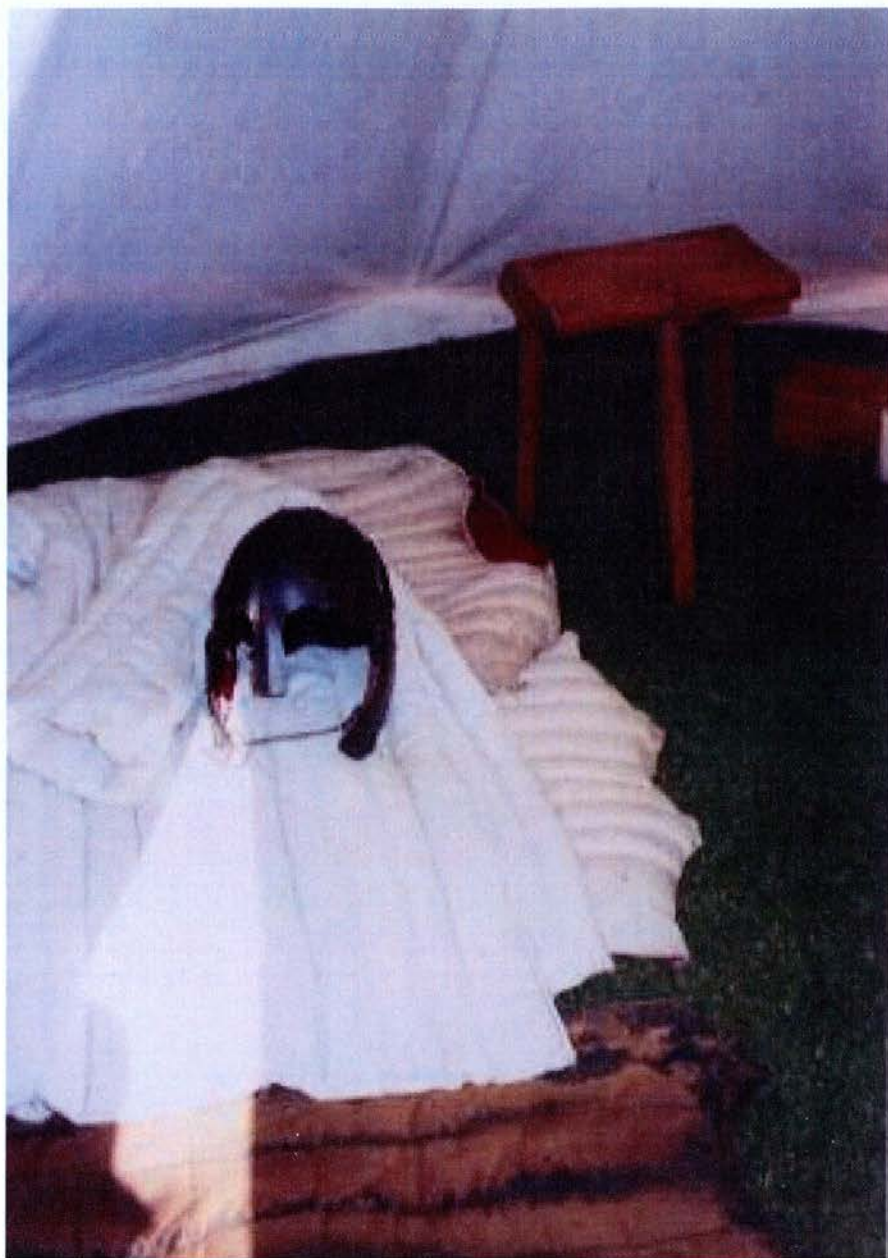


Figure 50 - tent with helmet and aketons

The fatigue of the day's events soon led to sleep, marred only by worry for my partner, who had been injured during a sparring practice a week earlier. A feinting polearm blow to the chest had cracked his rib and he had been experiencing difficulties when breathing (as is also common among re-enactors, he had declined a doctor's visit, agreeing to go

only after a week had passed and coughing was causing sharp pains in the chest). Broken bones, and the infection they could lead to, was actually the most common form of fatal injury during the middle ages, despite Hollywood's dramatic portrayals of severed limbs and heads. As I drifted off to sleep listening to laughter from the nearby pavilion, my mind was taken back to my very first meeting with this group which I had become, however briefly, a part of.



Figure 51 - squire with page

From First Encounter to First Aid

On another freezing cold day in late August of the 1998, I had gone to Stirling Castle to watch a group I had not previously encountered, 'Glasgael', demonstrate the recruiting, training, and arming of foot soldiers in the army of Robert the Bruce - all in a steady downpour of rain. A small encampment of canvas tents had been erected in the larger of the two gardens inside the walled enclosure of the castle, with a rope barrier keeping members of the public out of the central arena. There was a 'bell tent' - what might be thought of as a 'teepee' style, with a triangular silhouette - a circle of canvas suspended from a single central pole. Nearby, the round 'pavilion' was a smaller version of a circus tent, of the type we might be familiar with from stories of the knights of King Arthur: a round, pointed crest is held aloft by wooden spokes radiating from a central pole, resembling a wagon wheel turned on its side, and canvas sections drape down from this to be staked into the ground, with guy ropes providing additional support. This design allows more headroom, and the spokes provide convenient places to hang sweat- or rain-dampened clothing.⁷⁸ Finally, there was a 'traders' box' - an open-fronted stall tent much like a child's drawing of a house, with four flat walls and a pointed roof, the front side of which is lifted and held by three poles to form a flat porch or awning to cover goods at a market.

The group had set up a feasting table under the awning to provide a meal for the re-enactors as they rested between shows. The rough wooden plank table was covered with pottery jugs (filled, as I later discovered, with blackcurrant juice, not wine - ensuring that fighters remained alert and sober for these performances in which audience members are in close proximity). There were antler-handled knives, wooden goblets, and pewter trays filled with loaves of wholegrain bread, cheeses, cold cooked ham and

⁷⁸ This tent, as I later discovered, was quite complicated to erect, and required someone strong enough to support the central pole, and its weight of canvas, while others fit the spokes into the metal reinforced holes around the circumference of the tent crest. It was usually referred to as 'the knight's tent' among the re-enactors, as the group's leader slept here, along with one or two other members.

chicken, a pie, and tomatoes. A conscious attempt had been made, I was later told, to procure 'authentic' looking food, visiting shops where whole wheels of cheese and round loaves of bread could be bought.

The group had quite a few women members in active roles: their 'M.C.', or the person who announced the group, described and explained the upcoming performance, was a woman named 'Gwen'. I later discovered that she had a central role within the group, being responsible not only for the announcements and performance description, but for organizing bookings, practice sessions, and transport hire, as well as providing the food and directing the set up of the camp. While several women were 'garbed' in elegant medieval dresses, this group also had female combatants: two women warriors, wearing the stained 'aketon' padded arming tunics and rounded helmets of foot soldiers. These resembled the helmets still worn in the First World War by soldiers in the trenches: a round metal bowl, which I was assured could be used for cooking in, if necessity required, with a flat metal brim to shade the eyes and repel sword blows.

There were also several younger children in the group. I spoke to the father of two of them - 'Davie', a boy of 9, and 'Ewan', a 15-year-old - who told me that a friend of the older boy's had first gotten his son, and then himself, involved in re-enactment. When I told him I was studying re-enactment groups, he asked if I had heard of the Covenanter group The Sealed Knot - confiding that he wasn't interested in them, as 'they use guns'. Interestingly, several men I spoke with gave their enjoyment or dislike of the weapons of a historic era as their chief reason for choosing that period: while some revelled in the excitement of firing cannons and muskets, others hated the noise and smoke; some reviled the "hack and slash" of Viking axe and sword, extolling the elegance of the rapier.

'Neil', the father of the two boys, said his son 'Ewan' was eagerly awaiting his 16th birthday, when he would be legally old enough to engage in the fight scenes for public performance. Neil, also mentioned that they were not 'legally allowed' to fight indoors, which made it difficult to practice during the winter when the weather was bad. During

the course of fieldwork I met groups who did allow young children to take part in performances, and did practice indoors, so I believe that these 'legal' requirements were in fact 'insurance requirements'. Public performing groups generally need to have their own insurance, in addition to that held by the sponsors of the venue. Many groups band together, under an umbrella organisation known as the Condotierri (who were I believe a group of Italian Renaissance soldiers) in order to cut costs of such insurance provision. Other groups, fortunate enough to be granted permission by school boards or city councils to use parks or playing grounds for year-round practice, simply endured the Scottish weather. During my fieldwork, this was often as bad in full summer as might be expected in winter - and this particular day was a perfect example.

The introduction by Gwen explained that it was the year 1306, and that after years of retreating in hiding, Robert the Bruce was beginning to rally the people around him to expel the English overlords. The group's leader, Alec, came forward to inspect a line of 'potential recruits' - re-enactors dressed in the rustic woolen hoods, tunics and leggings of 13th century peasant farmers - in order to train them as 'footsoldiers'. As a 'knight', Alec himself wore a full suit of chainlink mail - a long-sleeved tunic, leggings, and hood all of forged steel links - over which he had a belted blue surcoat - a long, loose tunic which would help protect the mail from rain, and the sun's heat on hot days. His shield featured the heraldic device 'on a field azure, three stars argent' - or three silver stars against a blue background, and he was introduced as a knight recruiting for Bruce. After 'enlisting' the assembled group, he issued them with pikes (resembling spears, but longer and heavier, designed for thrusting rather than throwing) and began to drill them to march and turn in formation - without skewering one another. When they had reached a reasonable level of ability, he then taught them to form a 'shiltron', or hedgehog formation. In this, a rank of men kneel with their pikes butted against the ground, points up at an angle, while a second rank of men stand behind them and extend their pikes straight past the shoulders of the kneeling rank, protecting them. They may all face forward, to prevent the advance of enemy knights and even cavalry, or in duress may form a tight knot, with pikes protruding to all sides, front and back. This formation was used for centuries, up through the period of the Cromwellian Civil War, until heavy

artillery rendered it ineffective. Pikemen were essential in protecting archers, the highly trained 'artillery' of earlier centuries, as archers were valuable for long-distance attack but unable to protect themselves.



Figure 52 - a shiltron formation, including two women fighters

Alec explained to the audience that although a pikeman was no match for a knight - "your fully armoured knight was the equivalent of a medieval tank" - but it was equally true that few knights could penetrate the ranks of a shiltron of pikemen who kept in formation.



Figure 53 - The Knights of Royal England visit Tantallon Castle

Alec also spoke of the value of archers to a military undertaking, mentioning that after Edward I's conquest of Wales, the Welsh archers had joined his ranks and were one of the greatest threats to Robert the Bruce when the English king, known as The Hammer of the Scots, invaded Scotland. Several centuries later, Alec added, during the English invasion of France under Henry Tudor, so feared were the English longbowmen that the French would cut off the index and middle finger of captured archers to prevent them from drawing a bowstring, and then return them to their own side to instill fear in their ranks. This resulted, Alec explained, in a gesture still familiar in Britain today: the archers would hold their right hand up, palm inward, with these two fingers raised, curled towards the gesturer, with an upward flipping movement in the direction of their assailants, demonstrating they were still willing and able to fight.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ For those not familiar with the gesture described, I am assured it is used when dismissing an opponent in anger: "it means, eff off!". Strangely, in the U.S. this gesture is performed with the only middle finger rigidly extended - the reason for this transformation is unclear to me.

After this there followed a fight scene, in which Alec's second-in-command, 'Murray', as the captain of an English garrison at the castle, took half of the new recruits, while Alex retained the other, and a skirmish ensued. During the course of this melee, Alec was injured, not by a sword or axe blow, but by charging across the grass which was slick with rain. He sprained his ankle badly, but not only continued with the rest of that performance but went on for his central role in the next one, scheduled for an hour later, after the ankle was extremely swollen. I thought that this perseverance - the insistence that 'the show must go on' - would be considered admirable in an Olympic athlete. But I wondered also whether some would see it as a sign of 'machismo', or even of obsessiveness on the part of re-enactors. As I came to know this group later, I discovered that it was considered very 'bad form' to complain of injuries received during fighting, even if these included broken bones or fairly severe sword cuts. Those who did complain were seen as lacking in 'team spirit', and could lead to friction and division within the group, which I will discuss at a later point.

On this particularly 'dreich'⁸⁰ day, several of the group members chose to go barefoot despite the cold, because they said the soft leather medieval footwear didn't give them enough grip when wet. During this day's performances they also had extremely bad luck with weapons, which broke frequently, often in dangerous fashion. In the second performance, for example, Alec, already nursing the injured ankle, was in hand-to-hand combat with a man wielding an axe. Suddenly, as he blocked his attacker's blow, the axehead broke away from its shaft and flew through the air, landing next to Alec's already injured foot! For a moment I was sure a toe would be severed. In total, during the ensuing battle, I saw two pikes, two swords, an arrow, and the axe, snapped and broken.

After the conclusion of the performance, I spoke to the group members about what must clearly have been an expensive loss, and asked them if this was a typical amount of 'weapon casualties'. They replied that they had never before lost so many weapons in

⁸⁰ A Scots term for 'dark, dreary, or bleak'.

one day, and one man speculated that perhaps it was due to the extremely cold, wet weather placing an extra strain on them. It also may have been due to wear and tear, as this was the penultimate performance of what had been a long wet season. I couldn't help but think that Scotland's weather is likely to have been as cold and wet several centuries earlier as it is today, and wondered whether weapons and footgear in historic times suffered so adversely from rain, in which case one imagines fighting would have been infrequent!

This highlighted once more the problematic notion of 'authenticity': although the weapons *looked* correct, were made of the proper materials, steel and wood, and were made for use, not merely ornamental show, they weren't able to stand up to heavy wear and tear. I suspect that it is simply too expensive and time-consuming to make weapons up to the standards of professional medieval warriors - fire-hardening the wood, folding and beating the steel again and again - when one's life and livelihood do not depend on it. A tremendous commitment of resources goes in to making armour and weapons as it is: as one re-enactor told me, he had hand-bent, linked, and hammered each link in his chainmail tunic, but a true medieval suit of mail would have had each link then soldiered and riveted. Unfortunately, he told me, he did not have any vassals to perform this service for him!

I was impressed by the entire group's dedication, though concerned at what I thought of as a lack of caution. I had been seriously worried that someone might be badly injured during the performance, by slipping on the wet ground and perhaps falling against an opponent's weapon, or by a weapon fragment flying into someone unable to parry it. Later, I witnessed close-up the results of such injuries, which despite best intentions and training, are a frequent concomitant of the recreation of battles.

Battle at the Fort - and its aftermath

One such incident took place the following year at Fort George, along the coast of the Moray Firth near Culloden. Built after the 1745 Jacobite Rising in order to quell future rebellions, this site is still a working army base, but its historic buildings are managed by

Historic Scotland as part of the national heritage. I made several trips to Fort George, at first to watch other re-enactment troupes, and later along with 'Glasrael', who performed there frequently, either alone or along with other groups as part of what Historic Scotland advertises as "Extravaganzas". On this particular day it was sunny, and the performers were suffering on this occasion from heat rather than rain or cold. I had joined the group as a performing member at this point, and while my partner had been 'enlisted' as a footsoldier, I had been detailed to run jugs of water out to the combatants during the two shows to keep them from dehydrating.

During the climatic skirmish at the conclusion of the final show, 'Lachlan', the newest and youngest member of the group, a large lad of 16 who was being scouted as a rugby player for the Scotland team, was injured. As Gwen addressed the audience to explain that this was their final show for the day, and to thank them for coming, Lachlan came over to me where I sat in the 'living history' enclave of tents at the back of the field. I saw he was clutching his hand, and that it was streaming with blood. When I asked him if I could examine it, I saw that he had a swordcut between his middle and ring fingers. He had tried to parry a swordblade and had not been wearing gauntlets; the cut appeared to be at least an inch deep, but was bleeding profusely so it was difficult to see clearly. Although Lachlan seemed calm and uncomplaining, I was particularly upset as I had in effect 'introduced' him to the group. He had earlier become involved with my Edinburgh-based informants, but because he wished to participate in public shows, had asked if he could come along with my partner and I when we travelled and join the show. After clearing this with his parents, I agreed - but I felt a strong suspicion that they would wish him to be returned, literally, in one piece.

I called over some of the other group members to tell them that Lachlan had been hurt, but was given a piece of cloth and advised, "Just put this around it". "This" turned out to be a dirty t-shirt that one of the men had been wearing earlier under his jerkin but abandoned due to the heat. I refused to use this as a bandage, and insisted that Lachlan should get medical attention as the blood was still flowing. Surprisingly, however,

although we were on a military base, there was no doctor available, and we were advised to bring him to Raigmore Hospital near Inverness.

One of the locally-based members, Neil, took us to the hospital in his car while the others took down the camp and joined us later. Despite being short on numbers to accomplish this task, there was no risk that we would be ready to leave the hospital before they arrived - it took almost 3 hours for the doctors to see Lachlan. Interestingly, there were many 'weekend sports' injuries in the accident and emergency waiting room - cut heads and strained knees from football, etc. - but not surprisingly Lachlan's was the only swordcut the doctors had treated recently. He was finally cleaned up, and stitched, and we were ready to travel again.

Because we had come north together in a hired van, Lachlan's injury (or perhaps more accurately, my insistence that he get medical attention for it) meant that the entire troupe (except for the lucky local member and his sons) had to wait and set out on the several hours' drive south many hours later than expected. Lachlan's family lived in the Borders, and they had driven up in the early hours of that morning to bring him to Edinburgh, where we then relayed him to Glasgow, joining the rest of the group members in the hired van for the final stage of the journey. The plan had been to return from the day's performance, have a meal together in Glasgow, and then head on to Edinburgh that night, returning Lachlan to his parents who would drive up to retrieve him. However, somewhere outside of Aviemore we realized that it would be impossible to keep to this schedule, and when rumbling stomachs demanded that the van be stopped near a local chip shop, we also located a phone and tried to decide how to break the news to Lachlan's parents. Fortunately, between the teenage boy's nonchalance at injury, and the parents' familiarity with his rugby accidents, we weren't 'hailed over the coals'.

The gruelling journey was far from over, however. Added to the usual difficulties of travelling this well-known traffic fatality hotspot, the hired van had both a faulty headlight and 'dodgy' brakes, adding to Gwen's - inevitably the designated driver -

exhaustion. Moreover, two of the re-enactors turned out to have sunstroke, despite my attempts to act as 'water girl', and one of them subsequently became nauseous and we had to stop again. Finally, it turned out that my partner, who had been suffering all afternoon from an ache in his chest, had sustained a cracked rib from a blow with a pike during sparring training between shows, although this wasn't revealed until several days, a doctor's visit, and an x-ray, later.

What became clear to me during, and after, the performance at Fort George, and its aftermath, was not the physical danger of recreating battles - this had been apparent in my first encounter with the group a year earlier. What I learned was something about the mentality of re-enactors, an attitude which was self-reliant and - no pun intended - sanguine. The group's response to injury was simply, 'bind it up and soldier on'. No doubt this would also have been the response of real soldiers in past - or indeed present - days. But I failed to acquire that attitude - my panicked response was to call for an ambulance and antibiotics, anachronistic intrusions upon the alternative reality created by group. My violation was twofold: I had brought the late 20th century crashing in abruptly into the late 13th century world in which we had been living for most of the day; I had also brought outsiders (doctors and castle staff) in, disrupting group boundaries and preventing them from 'looking after their own'.

This incident, which occurred towards the end of my fieldwork, brought home to me the fact that despite my acquisition of many of the necessary skills and knowledge, I had not 'become' a re-enactor; I both understood clearly why 'they do it' and understood why I could not. And I experienced the guilt which I believe is typical of ethnographers who live for a long time among their research 'subjects' and form close bonds: the knowledge that despite these bonds, no matter how much you care for the people you have met, no matter how much you have enjoyed yourself, you will leave them.

'Embodying the past' - danger and discomfort

Re-enactors place a strong emphasis on embodiment, on the sensory experience of an alternate time, which may entail both physical discomfort and even injury. The passage

related above was a case in point. However, venues such as Fort George, or Caerlaverock, where I slept in a tent as part of the 'army' besieging the castle, were comparatively comfortable sites, even including such anachronistic (for medieval military encampments) luxuries as flushing public toilets and running water. Furthermore, the weather on both these occasions was pleasant, something not always to be expected of a Scottish summer.

It became apparent how sheltered I (in common with many members of Western society, I suspect) had become from the vagaries of the British climate only when I found myself deprived of this protection. In search of what they term 'period accuracy', re-enactors willingly submit themselves to what, to this researcher, seemed feats of endurance. Some groups (such as the American Civil War re-enactors mentioned earlier, who embark on long hikes without boots because 'the soldiers back then couldn't afford them'), seem actively in fact to seek out pain and discomfort, the endurance required to participate in such events acting both as price and proof of membership. When I acquired my own hand-sewn medieval leather shoes, I felt for the first time like a suitably attired re-enactor. The unvarnished, and unromantic, reality however was that they offered no traction, little protection from the elements, and an authentic 'first-hand' experience of every rock I trod on.

Some events, and venues, were much harsher than others, and on occasion the situation even became life-threatening. A Historic Scotland event at Tantallon Castle featured the Knights of Royal England, brought up, with their tourney horses, at great expense to this ancient castle stronghold on the Firth of Forth which had been largely destroyed by Cromwell's forces. Historic Scotland had gone to great lengths in order to prepare the castle grounds for the display of jousting in which this group (of stunt professionals and actors, not re-enactors, as will be highlighted later) specializes. The bridge across the outer moat had been strengthened and reinforced to allow heavily laden war-horses (rather than the usual camera-laden tourists) to be ridden into the tournament grounds within the castle's exterior walls. The turf itself had been carefully prepared, straw laid down, and strong wooden barriers erected around the jousting ring. Beautifully

photographed posters advertising the event featured brightly coloured, elaborate costumes worthy of Hollywood in its heyday.



The organizers were expecting a huge crowd, and had arranged the use of a neighbouring farmer's field for the overflow parking. What they hadn't expected, however, was a weekend of torrential and icy downpours. Large bundles of hay were then acquired from the farmer, in order to spread over the fields designated for parking, as the soil was of course not compacted and the churning of car tires, and especially of the heavily laden vehicles of the re-enactors, had quickly reduced the car park to deep sticky mud. At the time when we arrived, this had seemed just an unpleasant obstacle to both drivers and pedestrians. By the end of the first day's events, however, (which had seen a dismal turnout of tourists to match the dismal weather), the real gravity of the situation was revealed.

Several of the re-enactors had arrived that morning in large vans, in order to haul their camping equipment, tents, cauldrons, weapons, etc. Later that day a caravan arrived and parked next to them - it turned out to be a mobile hamburger stand hired by the organizers to provide food for the event. By day's end, however, the food caravan found

itself mired in the mud and unable to move. Its owner decided to leave the van there until the following day, during which he planned to continue his trade, and caught a ride back to the nearest town. This left two large vans of re-enactment 'kit' and weapons, which the owners deemed too valuable to be left unattended in a farm field, to attempt to pull out and around the burger stand and its quagmire.

Tantallon Castle, like many Scottish castles including St. Andrews, and Dirleton Castle further along the coast, stands right at the edge of a precipice above the sea, for obvious defensive purposes. When the second of the two re-enactors' vans attempted to pull around the stranded vehicle, they found themselves with their rear tires sinking and slipping backwards towards the cliff's edge. They quickly jumped out and abandoned the van, but unwilling to abandon their hard-to-come-by kit and weapons, they trekked for some distance across several swamped fields until they found the owner of the farm.

They were able to persuade him to come out with his tractor, and he successfully towed their van to safety. Surprisingly, when this episode was related to me, the driver of the van complained, not of the conditions at the site, nor of the preparations of the organizers, nor of the awkward parking of the burger seller, but of the 'soft' members of her re-enactment troupe who had been unwilling to spend the night on the cliffside in mud-sodden tents but had insisted on being taken back to someplace warm and dry.

This hints again at one of the ongoing arenas of contestation among re-enactors. The extent to which re-enactors actually 'experience' the pasts they attempt to recreate, and in fact the extent to which this is really desirable, is contested amongst re-enactors themselves.

The group members who had complained that they couldn't sleep on muddy ground on a wind-swept cliff in an icy downpour had broken with the illusion of 'authenticity', itself acknowledged as problematic among re-enactors. One member might argue that, had it 'really' been the early 14th century, the option to drive in a heated, enclosed motor vehicle to a heated flat with running water would not have been available, therefore, the

rebellious members' demands were 'non-authentic'. Others would defend their position by arguing that, given the chance of moving to a warm place with a roof over their heads, any medieval person would obviously have made the same choice - therefore they are 'behaving' in the way their medieval predecessors would have done⁸¹.

The notion of 'authenticity', then, is difficult to define as it is being continually contested by the re-enactors themselves. In another, even more serious incident, some Covenanting re-enactors, who had chosen to spend a week in an isolated site in Glen Uigg, reached by boat across a sea loch, 'living as a 17th century army'. Due to heavy rains, their island campsite was flooded - in fact the island itself disappeared, and they had to be airlifted out by rescue services after one individual slipped in mud and broke a leg and another contracted pneumonia. Again, the group member who imparted this story to me was more critical of these individuals' lack of knowledge of the (ideals) of 17th-century self-sufficiency than sympathetic, characterising them as 'long haired city louts'. They had failed to plan ahead, to bring several layers and changes of clothes, to remember that leather-soled shoes without modern rubber cleats soak through quickly and, perhaps even more importantly, have no traction on wet ground.

There are, it seems, advocates of complete 'period authenticity' who would argue that resorting to calling for help, using an airlift service, and indeed using modern medicine, are not in keeping with their chosen pursuit. Although most of my informants criticized this attitude, and said that 'obviously when you're wounded you'd use antibiotics', the incident at Fort George I believe revealed a subtle pressure to forego hospital treatment in favour of 'staying in period'. One of the reasons, then, that accuracy or 'authenticity' is so hotly contested is that it takes on so many forms - referring not only to clothing

⁸¹ On another occasion the group were offered a farmer's field to camp in during a show on the Black Isle, north of Inverness. When we finally located the farm, however, the field was so muddy that the heavily laden van was barely able to negotiate it, and an angry bull attempted to kick down the barrier to the field. When we were offered the chance to put our sleeping bags down in the local community centre instead (not only a roof overhead, but toilets, running water, a hotplate for coffee, and heating!)- most of the members were eager to accept, though Gwen deplored the lack of willingness to do 'rough camping'.

styles but materials, methods used in their making, tools, techniques, foodstuffs, attitudes, mentality, ideals, and behaviour.

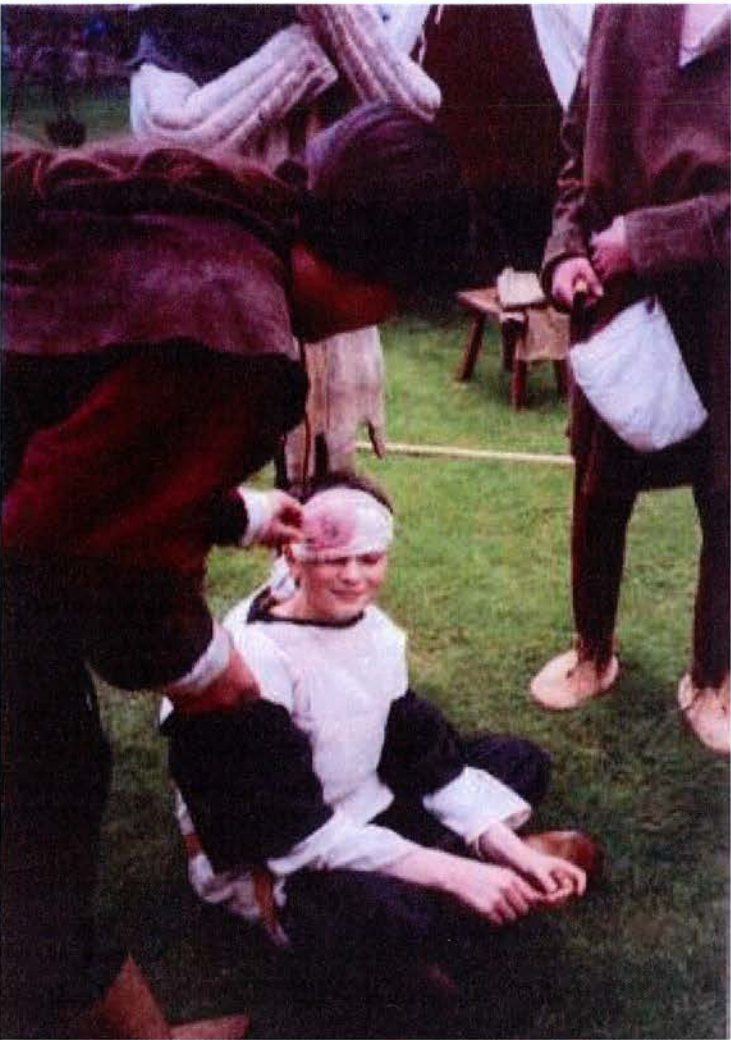


Figure 54 - a priest tending a wound, or a performer touching up makeup? Some attempts to portray the 'reality' of battle may have the opposite effect

The Lady with the Mead Cup

On my first encounter with 'Glasgael', during the intermission between their two battle performances at Stirling Castle the previous August, I had been approached by 'Eleanor', a woman in a beautiful red court dress who greeted me and offered me a drink from a wooden goblet. I spoke to her about the group's costumes, which appeared to me to be much more detailed and true to form than I had seen in some groups. She said that they researched and made their own clothing, and were particularly interested in emphasizing the 'living history'⁸² side of performances in future. As this was almost the last show of the season, she and Gwen said they would spend the winter making costumes and, of course, repairing tools and weapons. Because of my own interest in crafts and clothing, this aspect of the re-enactment world appealed to me.



Figure 55 - Lady sewing

When I asked about the history of the group, I was told that it was founded about 15 years earlier to commemorate the 120th anniversary of the Battle of Largs, and was initially a Viking group whose Gaelic name translated as 'Northern Invaders'. However,

⁸² This term is used to refer to domestic and social activities, rather than warfare, of a historical period, and may include displays of weaving, cooking, games, falconry, herbal medicines, market stalls selling candles, basket, and ironwork, etc.

they now specialized in the period of the Scottish Wars of Independence, late 13th and early 14th centuries. Because of my interest, I was presented to the group's leader, who introduced himself as 'Alec Girrard - yes, it's French'. My partner and I were both encouraged to join, and I was told that although I didn't have to fight, I was welcome to: "it probably looks like we're a lot more experienced than we are", Neil told us, "but it's not that difficult in reality".

When I asked about the women fighters I had seen that day, Gwen assured me that this was "true to history: Scottish women did go into battle". Her love and knowledge of the period seemed strong, but although I was aware that wives of medieval knights were known to have fought off sieges in defence of their husband's castles, and that Mary, Queen of Scots actually rode at the head of her own troops in a specially-commissioned armour breastplate, I continued to wonder how many women had actually fought as footsoldiers or engaged in hand-to-hand combat.

Throughout my research, I met many women who told me that women's role in warfare, as in many other aspects of life, had been 'hidden' or deleted from history books, and that they were reclaiming it. In fact, an entire website, researched and designed by women combat re-enactors, had been devoted to women warriors in history. I am not qualified to judge the accuracy of the claims of the website, nor of the research on which it is based, but I can testify as to the strength of belief and commitment on the part of the women who argue their right - justified by 'history' and 'authenticity' - to participate in combat. Certainly, within the historical development of re-enactment groups in Scotland during the late 20th century, there has been an increase in female membership and a movement away from a singularly male orientation. This has resulted in the growth of what re-enactors term 'living history' elements to public performances - domestic camps and market places featuring non-combat activities - and at the same time to a significant number of women fighters. Although women fighters might have been brought in to the ranks simply in order to encourage more women to join, or in order to be 'politically correct', it is significant that it was not in late 20th century values that justification was sought, but in a reclaimed, reacquired, 'history' itself.

‘Moving inside’

I met the group once more before the end of the performing season, at a multi-group event, which Historic Scotland advertises as ‘extravaganzas’, at Stirling Castle. Glasgael had teamed up with members of the Edinburgh Bird of Prey Centre to demonstrate falconry - Glasgael providing the period costumes, and EBPC the birds. During the performance, Gwen explained to the crowd that in medieval society, social rank was indicated by what type of bird one was allowed to hunt with. Such ‘sumptuary’ laws have been used in many hierarchical societies, including Japan during the Edo period (1600s until 1860), to forcefully delineate social class through proscribing types of clothing material, the ability to wear swords, bear heraldic arms, drive certain types of coach or have a certain number of windows in one’s house, etc. In medieval European society, Gwen revealed, only the king could hunt with an eagle; knights might use falcons which had been imported from the Middle East during the crusades, while ladies used a small merlin or goshawk.



Figure 56 - Gunnar's household encounter an owl

There occurred one incident which gave an interesting insight into what audiences want 'living history' to be. During the interval between shows, the birds were being fed with whole dead baby chicks. One tourist, a group member later told me (imitating an American accent), asked 'Is that *really* necessary?' The group were slightly amused, but equally exasperated, by this example of over-sensitivity, or excessive modern 'political correctness' - "What does he think, hawks should be vegetarians?", one member exclaimed, complaining that the audience had come to see examples of hunting with birds but didn't want to see the fact that these predatory birds eat meat. It is not only re-enactors, then, who experience problems with 'authenticity' - but they are burdened with its contradictions to a much greater extent because their pursuit constantly brings them into contact with what Schechner (1982) calls 'the subjunctive' - the not / but not 'not': 'I'm not a medieval knight - but I'm not not one, either'.

During the day we discovered that 'Alec', the group's leader who had been hurt at the earlier August show, had been quite seriously injured on that day. The doctor had later told him, he said, that he would have been better off to have broken his ankle cleanly, because instead he had torn loose a ligament, which 'retract like rubber bands' and are therefore harder to repair.

He urged me to keep in touch when the performance season ended, and think about joining the group, together with my partner. He said he wanted to get a wider range of 'characters' within the group, and that they really needed a priest, to represent an important part of medieval society. He also joked that they'd been hoping to get a leper, too, but couldn't find anyone willing to have a few body parts removed to get the right convincing 'look'.

After the performance, I was invited to meet the group socially at a pub in Glasgow the following week. When my partner and I joined them at a crowded popular venue off the main square, we saw our new friends for the first time in 'civvies' - regular street clothes rather than period dress. After ordering a round of drinks, the topic of conversation

swiftly turned to current politics, and I realized that the group were eager to discover the political views of the potential 'recruits' - my partner and myself. Gwen spoke about participating in an anti-BNP rally (the British National Party, a neo-fascist organisation which was associated with racist anti-Black and Asian stances). Participation in the anti-poll tax campaign of the late 1980s (seen in Scotland, I have been told, as a hallmark of popular socialist grassroots protest) was also mentioned, and Margaret Thatcher roundly derided. I believe that there was a concern among the group to establish that we were not supporters of, nor believed them to be, aggressive or xenophobic nationalists. Later in the conversation, historical witch-burnings in Scotland were brought up, and both Gwen and Eleanor took an anti-Christian stance, expressing their belief that the church had conspired to oppress pagans, and women in general. Many of the comments had a strong feminist, and socialist, lean.

Finally, 'Albannach', a group who had been involved in the extravaganza at the castle the previous week, were remarked upon with amused criticism. I had brought with me a programme for an upcoming event at Rothesay on the Isle of Bute, celebrating the 500th anniversary of the town's incorporation as a Royal Burgh, for which 'Albannach' had been hired to provide a re-enactment performance at the castle and participate in a processional pageant. The brochure, which described Albannach as "Scotland's top fight display team", was disparaged, while Gwen said jokingly, "ha, we are!" From the comments that followed, it became clear that while Albannach were acknowledged as superior fighters, their public claim to that label was negatively assessed as overdone self-promotion: 'bumming their chat', to use Alec's Glaswegian phrase.

Once this subject had been breached, further assaults upon Albannach's personnel and performance style continued: "What about that guy in the mini-kilt!", one exclaimed.⁸³ Another complained that their jokes were too scripted, and laden with sexual innuendo,

⁸³ Albannach perform early 18th century Scottish highlanders

while a third condemned the other group's Gaelic,⁸⁴ telling me "You know the guy who does the introduction in Gaelic? He's really from East Kilbride! [in the Central Belt lowlands] - he even did that bit in Aberdeen, where people speak it better than he does - I'd like to see him continue the whole show in Gaelic!"

I learned much during the course of the evening about Glasgae members' political and social beliefs, as well as their stance on religious and ethnic intolerance. Both historical and ethnic 'authenticity' of other groups were evaluated, and there was implied criticism of 'posing', of hypocrisy, and of sexist or 'macho' attitudes.

Conflict and Schism - Labour and Management

In addition to friction between groups, inner group disharmonies often arise over leadership and management decisions. Such disputes can lead to the break-up and reconfiguration of groups. The relation of this to both combat itself and conflicts with group leaders, can be illustrated by an incident that took place within Glasgae in the year prior to my fieldwork. Again, I was told this story by my informants on more than one occasion, but the 'villains' and 'heroes' of the piece altered according to the teller's allegiances. The final fragmentation of two 'splinter groups' away from the troupe followed clashes over finances, personalities, and finally personal injury, but started innocently enough.

'Neil' had originally joined the group after travelling to England to see one of their performances there and meeting the group leader, Alec, and another prominent member, William. At that time Neil lived in Cumbernauld, and as the group was based in the Glasgow / Port Glasgow area, he did not have far to travel for practice sessions. Over time, however, it emerged that William and Alec, both of whom had strong personalities, had different ideas on how performances should be run, and on the direction of the group, and distribution of the performance fees and items purchased

⁸⁴ Albannach use a standard introduction, in which their 'M.C.' begins the show speaking in Gaelic, pauses, looks at the audience in surprise, and asks, 'Does no one here speak Gaelic? Then I'll have to continue in the enemy's tongue - English.'

with this money. Things began to become strained, and in the meantime, Neil got a new job and moved north to Inverness with his family. As travel to practices was now more difficult, and perhaps because of ongoing stress within the group, Neil approached another new member, Andrew, and they began to discuss breaking away to form their own group.

During this period, William's girlfriend Heather, who was also an active group member, became distressed over the falling out, as she perceived it, between William and Alec. At one long weekend event down in the Borders, Heather several times approached Neil and Andrew as they were speaking quietly outside the tents. It seems that Neil had not wanted to risk angering Alec by telling him that he was leaving the group, and wished to settle things with Andrew privately without anyone else knowing. Therefore, they stopped speaking each time Heather approached. Heather, a sensitive person, felt very uncomfortable and believed that they were in fact discussing herself and William, and 'siding' with Alec against them. Matters came to a head when Heather, who was a competent swordswoman who took part in the group's staged battles, was injured during a show - by Alec. During the long drive back from the performance in the group's hired van, Heather complained that Alec had chipped a bone in her arm, and that she was seriously injured. The other members present felt that she had implied that the injury was purposeful, rather than a legitimate accident. It was agreed that she should have forgiven Alec, but instead chose to see it as evidence of antagonism against herself and William, and that this created a stressful situation for the other members. Soon after, William and Heather left to form their own Pictish re-enactment group, being paid to perform at Archaeolink.

Andrew and Neil, along with his sons, also left to form a new group, 'The Standard', with others from the Inverness area. Alec did not actually discover this 'defection' until the events organizer from Historic Scotland casually mentioned, while they were negotiating upcoming shows: "Did you know, those two men from your group, they've got a group of their own - they're doing shows for us this year?" Despite this, Neil was

forgiven, as he continued frequently to travel, with his new recruits in tow, to Glasgae performances - showing his continued loyalty to his original group.

I believe the main reason that Neil continued to be welcome within the group was that, despite his unwillingness to confide in Alec about his departure, his decision to leave was primarily logistical, due to the difficulties in travelling long distances to remain in the group. In the case of William, however, issues of 'ownership' - of the shape of performances as well as of money or material goods - were central to the dispute.

On one occasion Gwen complained that some members of their performance group "are wanting to come along, show after show, and just borrow kit and put it on rather than making or buying their own". Money that was acquired through their public performances had gone towards purchasing the group's beautiful tents, an impressive helmet collection, weapons, furniture, cooking utensils, fabric, and leather. Some individuals hinted that they felt these were purchased through their labour and that they shouldn't have to buy their own materials. Gwen however insisted that profits for performances were so low that an individual's share was no more than £2- £3 per show, and thus it made more sense to pool resources to purchase high-end goods.

My impression is that most group members were happy to avoid such administrative decisions - the literally mundane, in the sense of everyday, details of staging performances. But strife ensued at times when the labour of appropriating the past fell too heavily on the few leaders and their cohorts, or when, perhaps unsurprisingly, those leaders insisted on taking organizational and performance content decisions without prior consultation with the group as a whole.

Gwen, one of the chief organizers of Glasgae, told me she believed the group 'operated in the red', and that they made no money at all from their paid shows, although she was unclear on the actual figures. Most of the sponsors of re-enactment shows pay only for 'expenses', which for van hire, petrol and food for 20 people, can be quite costly - as much as £300 or more, Alec revealed. If disaster strikes - on the eve of one show, for

example, the van usually used by the group broke down, forcing them to hire another at 3 times the cost - then performances actually lose money for the group.

One evening Gwen expressed her unhappiness to me about several group members who were not, as she termed it, 'pitching in' when it came to organizational matters - pitching the camp, and so on. She said that "they just show up, they put on kit when they arrive, do a few fight scenes, and go home". Thus, these members were not sharing in the labour, which usually fell to Gwen, of hiring and picking up a van, driving around to various members' homes in order to collect equipment (the group's camp and weapons equipment - tents, tables, stools, benches, cauldrons, potteryware, sheepskin rugs, candles, armour, etc., were too bulky to be stored in one individual's flat), then upon arrival at the performance site, erecting the tents, and taking them down after the show. The task of driving inevitably fell to one or two people as well, as few members had driver's licenses.⁸⁵

Gwen said that she had realized that part of the problem was that she and Alec had never taught anyone else how to put up the tents. This was a somewhat complicated process necessitating knowledge of which pegs go where, and in what order, to avoid a collapse. Therefore, the work of erecting camp was simply expected of them. Some group members might therefore be accused of, if not avoiding work, the human tendency to 'let others get on with it' if they are volunteering to do so. Gwen realized she needed to teach others how to do these tasks, and then delegate them.

I suspect there was another factor involved as well. This is the fact that involvement in the organizational side is, of necessity, involvement in the present day - dealing with car hire firms, negotiating contracts - and is therefore not 're-enacting' to the purist. Those who are driven to perform their hobby in public - those who take the leap of moving from a private passion to running a public performance group - are motivated into engaging with what private performers term the 'mundane' world. For many avid private

⁸⁵ I discovered it is not as common in Scotland to have a driving license as it is in North America, where 'Driver's Ed.' is a common part of high school curricula.

practitioners, such contact, while engaged in communing with the past, is avoided at all costs, and indeed the aversion sometimes takes on the form of avoidance of pollution (Douglas 1966).

Re-enactment group leaders, through drive and force of personality, form troupes around themselves. Whether for reasons of pride in their hard-won skills, or of pedagogy and the desire to pass on their knowledge of the past, public performance groups need contact with the mundane world. It is the intended recipient of their message. In this sense, while private performers may be seen to practice an almost monastic pursuit of meaning within a community of like-minded individuals, public performers are in contrast engaged in proselytizing, and must perforce break down the barriers between the re-enactment world and those outside.

Peacock (1968) argues that all performances may be seen as rites - as symbolic actions with social consequences. Performances, however playful, also have an aura of the mystical: as Hughes-Freeland & Crain (1998:15) write, they are

a bringing into being out of nothing, an act which is magical, and which is made efficacious by the interaction with the audience: creativity is in the space between the actors and audience... something... emerges as participants bring together bits and pieces of knowledge in the performance: it creates reality and selves experientially. What validates the performance is that it is made real by the audience.

Turner has argued that where once religion and law provided means of social redress “which always contained at least the germs of self-reflexivity, a public way of assessing our social behavior” (1982:11), it has now fallen to the arts - visual and performing - to supply these. Many publicly-performing re-enactors have consciously taken up this standard, insisting to me that ‘people have to know their history / women’s role / the background of this religious conflict’ etc. Using history as a means of ‘telling a story about the present’ is a particularly powerful method. As D.K. Peacock (1991:1) notes,

One of the most awe-inspiring, and in the opinion of some, dangerous features of the theatre lies in its almost magical power of resurrecting historical personages from their graves.

The historical dramatist is therefore able to make a much greater impact with the recreation of such characters than is the literary biographer or novelist for, subject only to historical actuality and behavioural plausibility, historical figures may be reincarnated there, on the stage, before the audience.

I would argue that actuality and plausibility are not even strictly necessary, but that the persuasiveness of the performer and the preconceived beliefs of the audience may allow even figures of folklore and legend - King Arthur, Robin Hood - to be 'resurrected' before the spectators. What Turner (1982) termed the 'ergotropic' effect of heightened physical and emotional arousal which often flows from a powerful display of virtuosity on the part of a performer contributes to this process. This is what Schechner has referred to as "flow" or "presence" - the moment in which the intensity of a performance crosses a threshold, resulting in a "transformation of being and / or consciousness", in which: "either permanently, as in initiation rites, or temporarily, as in aesthetic theatre and trance dancing, a performer - and sometimes spectators too - are changed by means of performance" (1990:4). Both Schechner and Schieffelin are concerned with the 'success' of a performance. In Schieffelin's (1998: 198) analysis,

Everything (in ritual no less than theatre), from the observance of the correct procedures to the resonance of the symbolism, the heightening of emotion, the sense of transformation, all depend on whether the performers and other participants can 'bring it off'. It is always possible the performance may fail.

'Success' in any performance is subjective, and in re-enactment terms is difficult to judge. But signs of success include acquiring a new recruit - as happens when, during the post-battle public walk-through of the camp, a man or woman moves from admiring the costumes and handling the armour to asking, "Could I do this too?". Or success might be, as one re-enactor described it:

It's great when you're at a castle in the middle of nowhere, and a hundred folk show up - and then stay through both performances in the rain!

Reasons for Re-enacting

Chapter Nine: Humour – ‘Let us Laugh’, or, How many Normans does it take to change a tallow lamp?

This gift for laughter, this sometime ability to circumvent the tragedies of life and perceive and appreciate nonsense in a cognitive world culturally constructed on sense and reason, is one of the greatest rewards for being human.

- William E. Mitchell (1992)

In the course of looking back through my fieldwork materials I was struck by how much of my informants' conversation was centred on humour in its many different forms. Slapstick or physical clowning was used by only one or two of the re-enactment groups within their public performances. In contrast, word-play in the shape of banter, teasing, irony and punning, humorous anecdotes, and jokes in the standardized set forms currently popular in British and American culture, all appeared frequently. Indeed, even when my re-enactor friends were instructing me in weaving or sword techniques, or in some aspect of the social history of a particular period, the lectures and demonstrations were constantly peppered with humour. Like many fledgling ethnographers, I ignored much of this 'banter' in an earnest effort to record the 'serious' topic in which I was being instructed. Only later, on my own, did I jot down many of the jokes, stories or remarks.

It came as a surprise, therefore, to realize that despite having pages of detailed notes on late medieval dance steps, heraldry, types of armour, and 9th century Saxon recipes, interspersed with all of these and in even greater abundance I have - jokes. The question arises, then, as to why I had in effect 'shunted' aside these materials to concentrate on more classically 'anthropological' concerns such as constructions of national identity, political contestation, or notions of fictive kinship, when from a phenomenological point of view humour must clearly be seen as a central aspect of my informants' own view of their interactions.

One answer must surely be the status of humour within the discipline itself. William E. Mitchell, in his preface to *Clowning as Critical Practice*, notes that “clowning is not a serious concern to most anthropologists” (1992: viii). He locates the reason for this in the time-honoured and stereotypical view of science as a serious and positivist enterprise, and in our discipline’s desire to identify itself firmly with that image. Although reminding us that Malinowski, in his own preface to *The Savage Hits Back*, claimed “anthropology is the science of the sense of humour” (1966:vii cited in Mitchell 1992), few anthropologists have considered humour a worthwhile and valid area for inquiry or source for theory. In fact, Mitchell adds, the redoubtable *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* contains no entries on humour, aside from one short paragraph on joking relationships. Nor has the topic been discussed in introductory university anthropology textbooks, nor formed the basis of any of the essays contributed to the *Annual Review of Anthropology*.

This begins, then, to look like a more than accidental omission. Ironically, one of Edinburgh University’s very own, the anthropologist Ralph Piddington, wrote a general treatise on *The Psychology of Laughter* in 1933. Yet he omitted mention of this topic in his much later encyclopedic work, the classic 1952 textbook *An Introduction to Social Anthropology*. Indeed, almost half a century later, the *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Barnard and Spencer: 1996) hardly goes much further. ‘Joking and Avoidance’ are compacted together into a single brief entry which includes only two bibliographical references, Radcliffe-Brown and Griaule, in 1924 and 1948 respectively.

Over the years, ethnographers have ignored the humour expressed by their subjects, or subsumed such comic accounts within the larger anthropological categories of religion (sacred clowns) or kinship (joking relationships). Radcliffe-Brown’s (1952) interest in the function of the latter in maintaining social structure probably rescued many such accounts from complete obscurity. However, as John G. Kennedy demonstrates in his analysis of the ‘bonds of laughter’ among the Tarahumara Indians of northern Mexico, a close reading of ‘ethnographic facts’ seems to indicate that many ethnographers have accepted Radcliffe-Brown’s premise equating joking with avoidance relationships, even

when this contradicts other data. Specifically, Kennedy (1970) argues that joking relationships do not always indicate the presence of social disjunction, and advocates abolishing the practice of placing joking and avoidance on opposite ends of a 'continuum' of attitudes of respect.

In this chapter I would like to look at some of the theoretical perspectives on humour and its uses in social interaction, including linguistic and sociological approaches. Anthropologists and other social scientists who have begun to analyse clowning behaviour and conversational humour in context argue that different types of humour may stem from different sources, and serve different purposes. I will also give examples of both verbal and written humour used by re-enactors.

What is Humour? Some difficulties of definition

"...humour can be simply defined as a type of stimulation that tends to elicit the laughter reflex" - Koestler (1974)

The quote above from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* seems a simple point at which to begin an analysis of humour - positive and concise. However, note even here the several *caveats* contained in this brief sentence: "tends" to elicit - though it may simply produce a smile and a shake of the head; "a type of stimulation" - but other types may produce the same effect. Embarrassment, for example, is often seen to result in laughter; discomfort with an awkward social situation may do the same; some people laugh with relief after a stressful situation is resolved. Although it can be said with certainty that laughter, like language, is a human universal (Chiaro 1992), the causes of laughter - even if we limit this to those cases caused by humour - are extremely variable, and depend upon linguistic and sociocultural understandings. They are furthermore often determined by national boundaries, historical changes, class, age, or personal preference (ibid). Small wonder then that researchers attempting a precise description of a culture, or scientific analysis of a particular social structure, might wish to avoid this 'barrel of monkeys' entirely.

Literary critics and philosophers have not been averse to tackling the subject of humour and comedy, however. Plato claimed that our tendency to laugh at the ridiculous mixed 'pleasure and pain'; Aristotle believed that which is base or inferior, yet not to the point of being disastrous, was laughable; while the French critic Henri Bergson argued that we laugh at that which is 'rigid' and 'inelastic' (Chiaro 1992). The common theme here is of clumsy mishap and blunder, whether through a slapstick-style pratfall or verbal gaffe. This may be a reason why some ethnographers wish to avoid the subject. Probably the most common source of humour in ethnographic accounts is due to the bumbling of anthropologists themselves. If so much of humour is derogatory, or mean-spirited, we do not wish to expose ourselves as the butt of such jokes. Nor do we wish to attribute what seem such unattractive qualities to our informants, with whom we have developed close bonds during fieldwork.

Yet perhaps these interpretations of humour are overly negative. *Chambers Dictionary* offers us a lighter, more cheerful definition which includes the notions of 'mirth', 'delight', and 'playful fancy' (1994). And we must not forget that much of the humour which we witness, and in which we engage ourselves, is neither accidental nor bumbling, but carefully crafted and purposeful.

Types of Humour and their Strategic Use

Alexander (1997), in his analysis of English verbal humour, attempts a detailed typology of modes of humour. His criteria include the intentionality of humour, whether it is 'malevolent or benevolent', and whether the intention is to amuse, display intellectual wit, or indulge in 'light-hearted' action. I will concentrate on examples of intentional humour as practiced by re-enactment group members. Alexander divides intentional humour into two categories: 'amusing wordplay', which I argue is utilized in order to reinforce group bonds, and 'critical wordplay', including satire, lampoon, caricature, parody, impersonation and sarcasm, which serves to heighten group identity in contrast to non-group 'others'. These latter types are intentional and 'malevolent', in the sense that they are "employed unequivocally to ridicule and make fun of people. The butts of these modes are intentionally taken under fire for the purpose of amusing (usually) like-minded ... listeners sharing similar views, in a social, cultural or political sense" (Alexander 1997:11). To these I will add a third category, 'pedagogic' wordplay, in which humour is used as a teaching tool (Turner 1967). Both amusing and critical humour can be used gnomically, to pass on values and demonstrate expected behavioural norms.

P.B. Hammond's (1964:264) study of social processes revealed in Mossi joking noted that these functioned as 'adjustive mechanisms', aiding in communication, in social control, and emotional catharsis. It provided:

a permissive and flexible context in which a grievance can be expressed, thus allowing for its rectification and restoration of amity. As a means of control, the public nature of most joking serves to shame the object of jocular offensive, to invoke social pressure for his conformity and to elicit support for the complainant. As a means of catharsis, the joking expression of aggressive feelings reduces frustration and thus serves indirectly to perpetuate the amicable aspect of the relationship in which it occurs.

Significantly, the processes involved in producing different types of humour tell us much about the social roles of the participants involved. Long and Graesser (1988) distinguish between 'context-bound' humour, which they label 'wit', and 'context-free'

humour, in which they include the repeated or recited joke. Such 'canned' jokes, says Alexander (1997:11) are essentially "circumscribed, closed, complete, time-independent, 'structured'. In contrast, 'wit' or 'saying things funny' is dependent on the immediate context, participants and surroundings; it is "open-ended, ongoing, linear, temporally limited" (ibid). The speakers who employ these divergent types therefore assume different roles in utilizing them. While the recitation of a planned 'joke' will be "unidirectional, dominant..., monologic", a speaker engaging in 'witty' word-play employs "back and forth (multi-sourced), co-equal, dialogic" strategies (ibid).

Douglas (1968:365-8) also distinguished between spontaneous and 'standardised' jokes (e.g., 'Three men walked into a bar...'), arguing that the former were 'morally neutral'. Basso's (1979:109) research on Apache joking seems to contradict this, however: "Joking imitations not only deal with moral topics - courtesy, politeness, respect - but comment upon them in unequivocally moral terms."

In my own experience among re-enactors, it is the latter, open-ended and spontaneous word-play, which was primarily 'played upon' during in-group interactions. The social effect of this practice, I would argue, is two-fold. In being multi-sourced, unstructured and open-ended, it tends to *draw in* group members. It enhances communal bonds and highlights the group ethos of equality and participation, an ethos which, I will argue below, may be more ideal than real. At the same time it focuses group attention *within* on the assembly of re-enactors and the playful reality they are constructing together, rather than on an external 'mundane' world. For example, re-enactors frequently enjoy stories of their encounters which feature amusing interactions with bemused 'mundane' (non-re-enacting) people. One one occasion, Ragnhild described her oldest daughter creating some consternation when she first began to attend school. The little girl was asked by the teacher, "What does your daddy do?", to which she apparently responded: "He kills people on weekends".

As Norrick argues, "conversational joking allows participants to perform for their mutual enjoyment with a consequent enhancement of rapport... humor is seen as helping

smooth the work in everyday conversation, as well as offering us a chance to play: to present a self, test for common ground, and create rapport in entertaining fashion” (1993:43). He cites Bateson’s argument that we ‘frame’ our actions through a ‘meta-message’ - ‘This is play’. Even seemingly aggressive actions or talk can elicit laughter within a ‘play frame’; however, that ‘playful’ act continues to denote the corresponding serious act. In play therefore, as in ritual, one act ‘stands for’ another act. Goffman also (1967) noted that joking could be used in what he termed ‘aggressive face work’, in which verbal repartee is used in ‘scoring points’. Play, therefore, has both a social control function and a stress-reducing effect.

Punishing Puns

Punning was particularly popular among some groups. On one occasion, members were sitting around looking at a recently-acquired book on early medieval jewellery, with a cover photograph of ornate necklaces, rings, brooches, heavy chains and medallions, unearthed in an archeological dig. This sparked a round of jokes:

Aldis: That looks like the shield of Ankh-Morpork!

Ecce: Very nice! Barbarian hordes welcome.

Gunnar: Vikings would broach those lines.

For those not familiar with the novels of Terry Pratchett, Ankh-Morpork is a fictional, pseudo-medieval city in the Diskworld, a fantasy world much-beloved of re-enactors and pagans in Britain. Aldis had initiated the joking, but in a typically self-effacing way, flagging up a shared mutual love among the group for this writer’s work. This served to heighten rapport in much the same way as might occur in an office situation where co-workers recite favourite Monty Python sketches (another re-enactor’s favourite) or episodes of Not the Nine O’Clock News or Chewin’ the Fat.

Both the men who joined in next, however, chose to signal their verbal prowess by the use of puns on the words ‘horde’ and ‘broach’ - heightening their own status through competitive verbal duelling. The closeness of some social bonds is such that participants may think nothing of dispensing with more typical outward signs of respect and

affection and engage in mock verbal battles, which Tannen (1984) has termed 'ritual combat'. She notes that paradoxically, the enhancement of power and the strengthening of solidarity may be combined in joke telling. This seems particularly apt for some of the banter I witnessed, especially between male re-enactors. I also believe that re-enactors, in their efforts to recreate a complete, alternative yet historically situated world, may be consciously attempting to recreate certain earlier forms of humour. There are traces, for example, of what Benton (1988:42) has called 'peasant humour', still common in Britain, which along with preoccupations with sex, death, and scatological references, features 'delight in the misfortunes of others'.

Alexander (1979:128) proposes that "the tendency to engage in punning may be more predominant in Anglo-Saxon countries" and plays upon the frequency of homonyms in the English language (in contrast, say, to Chinese or Hungarian), which may be exploited and deliberately misunderstood to create humorous disjunctions.

In the re-enactment group in Edinburgh which specializes in the Anglo-Saxon (or Hiberno-Norse) period in Scotland, attempts were often made to emulate, or re-create, earlier forms of speaking and entertaining typical of the time of Beowulf. In addition to punning, such practices included the memorizing and reciting of epic poems to a large gathering, and boasting of one's prowess or exploits in combat. These features are clearly seen in the earliest Anglo-Saxon writings. In these, a love of alliteration and the sound of words, added to an emphasis on reciting lists of one's own prestigious connections and important accomplishments, were typical.

Amusing Anecdotes

Another common form of verbal humour enjoyed among the re-enactors was the sharing of humorous anecdotes, sometimes of a personal nature. On one occasion, Ecce told of a feast he had attended at Caer Caledon (St. Andrews), during which he had begun to tell some of his favourite Norman jokes, when one man dressed as a knight protested, "My lord, I am a Norman!" Ecce then responded, "all right, then - I'll tell it *real slow*". He then proceeded to relate to us some of the 'set-piece' type jokes he had told at the feast:

“What do you get when you cross a frog with a pirate? A Norman”.

This however led to a bout of competitive joke-telling, with Gunnar interjecting:

“How many Normans does it take to change a tallow lamp? None - that’s what Saxons are for”.

To which Ecce responded:

“How many Vikings does it take? Don’t need one - you can see fine by the light of the burning village.”

And Gunnar capped this with:

“What do you get when you cross the Channel with a bastard? Rich”.

Here, the two men had effectively dominated the social stage by their performance of these closed, standardized joke types. The use of open-ended humour such as punning games or anecdotes, however, builds group solidarity. It can enhance rapport, and serve gnomic and pedagogic functions in delineating group values, rules and practices. As Norrick notes, “anecdotes disrupt the flow of conversation less than canned jokes do: they produce almost immediate audience participation, and thus work less like a practiced performance for a passive audience than a routine contribution woven into the ongoing pattern of alternating turns” (1993:49).

Furthermore, relating such personal anecdotes in a sense deposits them in a ‘common bank’ of vicariously shared experience, Norrick argues, and if we laugh together at them it intensifies the enjoyment, fixing it firmly in collective memory (1993:49). An example of an incident of this type took place at a medieval feast I attended where participants, dressed in elaborate finery, were relaxing after the meal by discussing the difficulties of balancing their ‘mundane’ and re-enactment lives. One man was describing what it was like to work in an office where several people are re-enactors, and members of the same society. Then ‘Lady Amadale’ joined in:

One friend of mine, whose husband had just been declared king⁸⁶, was sent a dozen yellow roses at the office. One guy said, “Who died and made you queen?” (to general laughter). “So she had

⁸⁶ In this group, leadership of fictive kingdoms is decided through skill in combat.

to explain who had died, and made her queen.

Cheap and Nasty

No. 27

The Organ of Fraser's Daughters

**"It's a @* &+!>? hobby!
For fun!!"**

Exclusive



North-east man Mr Stephen Turriff ("print my age and I'll be round with me mates") of Abergeldy Terrace in Aberdeen was involved in a fracas down in Aylesbury recently. He is reported to have travelled there with a number of other north-east men for a bit of "Knotting" as they call it. The pitched battle, with an assortment of weapons, including firearms, is thought to have been pre-arranged. ...*Continued inside*

Figure 57 - re-enactment group newsletters share news and amusing anecdotes

When the laughter over this story died down, she continued:

And the receptionist there knows who the SCA members are, which is good: there's not many offices where you can call and ask for 'Lord Roland, Death Dealer', and be told 'Just a minute and I'll put you through.'⁸⁷

Humour as Membership Badge: its role in 'gate-keeping'

Such tales may also feature gaffes made by the teller in an earlier, less knowledgeable stage when first engaging in re-enactment. More often they revolve around mistakes made by either audience members or bystanders at a particular event. They may also target members of other, less "authentic" re-enactment groups, or those who fail to observe "honourable" rules of combat and chivalry in such events. "Humour provides a socially acceptable vent for hostility toward other people and their idiosyncrasies" (Norrick 1993:5). Examples of some of these include the following incident, related by Alec, who was demonstrating the suiting up and arming of a 13th century knight at a historic site in the west of Scotland:

So I was showing them the knight's gear, you know, and I got to the rosary (indicates the plain wooden rosary beads and crucifix hanging looped from his belt) and I was telling them that as a Christian, the knight would have worn these into battle, and this woman from the audience - and her wee kid's in a Rangers top - says, 'Even the Protestant ones?'.

The woman's speech, and her child's clothing, marked her out as a probable west of Scotland native. This anecdote served to comment on the, to the re-enactors, laughably lamentable lack of knowledge of her own history on the part of the audience member. Additionally, it flagged up her faulty religious knowledge - there being, of course, no Protestants in the Middle Ages. It also operated, I believe, as a critique by the group upon sectarian attitudes in Scotland generally. This allows them thereby to signal their own tolerance, superiority, and distance from such attitudes. Although an anecdote,

⁸⁷ Another contemporary British context in which personas, or pseudonyms, are used, is in the re-creation of the Druidic ceremony of bardic poetry competition in the Welsh *Eisteddfod* festival, in which all entrants are known by 'bardic pseudonyms' (Davies 1998: 146).

unlike a proper standardized 'joke', often has no obvious 'butt', it can evaluate, criticise and blame, and thus contains a 'social control' function, as Norrick (1993:78) says:

We poke fun at those who are different from us, but also at the foibles and slips of members within our group; and in both cases our laughter aims at behaviors which we censure or at least seek to avoid...
mocking has a regulative effect on a group.

An example of the other types of anecdotes, aimed at other re-enactors who fail to meet the speaker's (and his or her listeners') standards in terms of dress, deportment or skill, might be the following comment by Gunnar about a Viking re-enactment he'd once attended. "That bunch showed up in tartan car boot blankets with fake fur wrapped around their legs!" No further comment was needed to thoroughly dismiss the other re-enactors, as everyone present, myself included, knew that there is no evidence of tartan weaving at that point in history. Nor did Vikings of the time parade around in badly cured furs or sport horned helmets, but rather were partial to finely woven fabrics and detailed embroidery.



Figure 58- Hrolf with dane axe - note embroidered details on cap and swordbelt.

On another occasion, Aelfroth (this fictive persona name is in itself a play on words and Saxon drinking customs) remarked about an opponent that “he’d use a Dane axe to go up against a Saxon sword”. This statement, encountered early in my fieldwork, was met by puzzlement from the ethnographer, but with guffaws and general merriment from the others present. When I enquired about the significance of this at a later date, I was simply told by the speaker that “Dane axes are like nuclear bombs”. By this remark, and through my own observation, I came to understand that this axe lacks the subtlety of a sword. Like a bomb, it is a weapon of ‘mass destruction’, effective in attack but of little practical use in terms of self-defense. The joke, then, was that the man with the Dane axe had no sense of self-preservation.



Figure 59 - Two vikings clash with dane axes

However, none of this was explicitly stated by my informant. I felt that the fact that I had to openly inquire flagged up my status as an outsider, or someone who was not fully conversant with the arcane knowledge required to be a ‘real’ re-enactor. In retrospect, I believe the comment also indicated something about the belief, expressed by several re-enactors, that modern warfare was essentially dishonourable. Although never denying the savagery of historical battles, many seemed to feel there was something impersonal and inhuman about long-distance, faceless mass warfare. Through such remarks they sought to distance themselves, perhaps, from gung-ho militarism. As Norrick (1993:17) remarks, “[p]articipants in conversation give and get clues and hints about their group

membership, attitudes and background knowledge". Or, as related earlier, one young re-enactor put it when army cadets sought to recruit him: "What, are they nuts? That's real blood they're talking about!"

Labov and Waletzky (1967) argue that for maximum communication 'value', the narration of a personal anecdote should include the speaker's own reactions to and evaluations of the incident related. This aids in 'presenting a self' (Goffman 1959) to the listener and in seeking ratification for that self (Tannen 1984). However, the situation related above reveals the 'testing' function of humour, in the sense of Sacks (1974) or Sherzer (1985). Here, listeners are evaluated not only on their ability to 'get' the joke but also to share the moral or conclusion being implied. Sacks claims that a joker 'challenges' listeners to demonstrate that they share his or her knowledge, proven by laughing at the right place. Sherzer says that a double type of aggression is involved: against the 'butt' of the joke, and against the listener, whose intelligence and (perhaps specialized) knowledge both are being assessed. Thus, humour performs a "gate-keeping" function (Alexander 1997), and shared humour becomes a "badge of membership" (ibid).

Much of the humour of one group in particular was targeted at outsiders - in this case, 'Sassanach', or the English - and centered on violence and bravado: "as we Highlanders say, 'Slay more with a claymore!'", declared one (this phrase was also printed on the t-shirt of the group's leader).



Figure 60 - black humour: a grisly display of limbs

A favourite 'bit' during this group's performances is when one fighter has his hand 'chopped off' with an axe, and an extremely realistic rubber fake (bloody 'meat' around protruding 'bone' stump) is thrown into the crowd . After it is retrieved, Mungo, the group leader, picks it up, dangles it, and says "Is this what ye yellin' about?! I've had worse paper cuts!". On one occasion, he elaborated by disdainfully tossing the 'severed' hand towards the junior members of the troop standing at a distance, with the order "Give that to the BraveTarts! Have them put it in the haggis!" This was a reference to the women troupe members, who were clustered in a back corner (out of sight of most audience members) cooking for the group's evening meal.

Although humour may be used to express antagonism towards outsiders, this aggression is often not expressed openly, as a direct challenge to a possibly dominant or numerically large 'other', but within the group to express solidarity (Apte 1987a, Schutz 1989). Funnily enough, then, joking can both serve social control or corrective functions and at the same time regulate social conflict. Fine (1983) argues that certain types of humour, such as in group kidding and satire, reveal group norms and values and serve to enforce them. Sarcasm and parody are generally directed at outsiders and serve to diffuse tensions or aggression towards these 'others', or their inappropriate behaviour. At the same time they reaffirm the group's own perspectives and unify them in the complicity of laughter. Within the 'charmed circle', behaviour which could be interpreted as aggressive or dangerous were it aimed at strangers or others, becomes transformed. It is positive proof that 'we need not stand on ceremony together'.

According to Norrick:

(1993:134), "[i]n such a relationship, kidding counts as positive, friendly politeness by flouting the conventions of negative, deferential politeness". To use Radcliffe-Brown's analysis, joking is characterized by 'privileged license' as well as 'permitted disrespect' (1952).

This is again demonstrated in Basso's (1979) ethnography of the Western Apache, who argue that joking can be dangerous, and should only be attempted with someone with whom the joker has formed a strong, flexible relationship. The analogy used by the Apache themselves is with buckskin, which starts out as hard, stiff untanned hide but is transformed, through a long gradual process of hard work and 'stretching', into pliable, useful, soft buckskin. Joking acts as a form of 'social stretching', but must be done carefully so as not to risk 'tearing' the relationship. Once fully 'cured', softened and developed, participants in an Apache joking relationship may be seen in a sense to 'boast' about the quality of that relationship, as the maker of a fine buckskin might, by exhibiting it disdainfully, ostentatiously pulling at it, and complaining of its quality. Such a display is only possible with a buckskin (or a friendship) that is well-worn, supple, and durable.

Among the Bachama of Nigeria also, Stevens (1978) notes that joking relationships form a 'badge of identity' which can be a source of public pride as it symbolizes a bond of unity and "exclusiveness of association". The ability to be a comic, to relinquish one's dignity for the purpose of smoothing over times of social disjuncture, is also much admired in other communities, such as among the women of Tubetube island in Papua New Guinea (Macintyre 1992). Those who can make us laugh, or those with whom we can laugh together, are often highly sought-after and respected individuals. No feast or gathering among my locally-based group was complete without the amusing stories and comments of Aelfroth and Gunnar. As Witherspoon (1977:185) revealed in his studies of Navajo language and metaphors, "humor and generosity are closely linked traits. They are both social acts that lubricate social interaction and enhance social harmony."

Gender, Status, and Joking Performance

The emphasis on equality and sharing within group interaction does falter, however, when one takes a closer look at the role of gender in such interactions. I found most such interchanges in mixed-gender groupings were performed by men, with women as the audience. This supports other findings (Maltz and Borker:1982; Norrick:1993) that indicate that in mixed-company groups, it is men who do the joke-telling. This came as a surprise to me. Many of the women I'd met through re-enactment groups had very strong personalities, and both their public declarations and private statements were often at pains to demonstrate the importance of women in early medieval societies, including their role in defence of villages and castles. In actual practice, however, these groups were reproducing patterns reported elsewhere for mixed-sex banter in British and American society: the women take the parts either of audience or sometimes announcers, while men take on the role of comedian.

Deborah Tannen's analysis (1984) of conversational styles argues that, in general, humour will act to make an individual's presence more strongly felt within the group, and that 'performing' jokes in particular (rather than simply engaging in spontaneous wit) will 'flag up' the individual joker because it gives notice to the listeners that "this is play"; something different is about to happen, and thereby suspends the ongoing flow of

conversation. This can be seen as an interruption or intrusion, of course. As Norrick remarks, it indicates that “the teller has no compunction about derailing the interaction in progress for the ostensible purpose of amusement” (Norrick 1993:120). Engaging in word-play, then, can strengthen social bonds but may carry social risks: and the use of set-form canned joke types carries both the greatest potential benefit as well as the greatest potential risk. The closeness of some social bonds is such that participants may think nothing of dispensing with more typical outward signs of respect and affection and engage in mock verbal battles, what Tannen has termed ‘ritual combat’ (1996). This seems particularly apt for some of the banter I witnessed, especially between male re-enactors. For example, when one younger man was speaking to the group on the topic of medieval house building, he was interrupted:

Rhodri: “Masons got 6 pence a day, wardens - the overseers - got 10 pounds a year.”
Ieuan ap Arthur: “That must’ve been good wages - the Masons are doing pretty well now.” (referring to Masonic lodge members)

When another member attempted to explain ale brewing, he instructed us to “stir carefully and cover with a lid, but not too tight or it will go PHUT!”, at which point a senior member joked, “Only fair - you do, too.” Much of the joking between men was what Benton (1988) has referred to as an earthy ‘peasant humour’ still common in Britain, concerned with bodily processes such as farting, sex or death. Douglas claimed that jokes “do not affirm the dominant values but denigrate and devalue. Essentially a joke is an anti-rite” (1968:102). While much joking may appear obscene or grossly insulting, it relies on the social situation - on consensus - for recognition as humorous play.

It is perhaps no surprise to discover that among my informants more ‘inclusive’ or interactive forms of word-play were generally chosen - puns, teasing, wisecracks and humorous stories. The ‘riskier’ types of set-jokes were saved up for use in newsletters or other non-face-to-face contexts. Even when these ‘inclusive’ forms of humour are engaged in, however, it was generally men - and, it might be noted, older and more

experienced men, who enjoyed higher status within the group, who employed them. Interestingly, this pattern also finds reflection among the Western Apache, who, according to Basso, generally use the more 'dangerous' forms of Whiteman-parody joking only among more senior men (1979).

Spontaneous vs. Set-Piece Humour

Standardized-form jokes enjoy popularity among re-enactment groups, but tend to appear in different contexts. 'Canned' or set-form jokes of this type, Chiaro (1992) points out, signal by their very structure that a playful or non-serious form of communication is being entered upon: "This is now a joke". Such types include knock-knock jokes and riddles of the "What's black and white and red all over?" or "What do you get when you cross an X with a Y?" type. More recent incarnations include the type which now make the rounds on the Internet via email, "You know you're a baby boomer / computer geek / 90's man when"... and are followed by lists of amusing 'flags' or identity marking traits or qualities which are intended to elicit amused recognition or embarrassment on the part of the recipient.

While teasing, wisecracks, puns and irony feature often in conversation among re-enactors, set-form jokes of the type above appear most frequently in the newsletters or publications produced by many groups for their own members. I collected quite a few issues from several groups. Two were from Cromwellian Civil War period groups and two others from groups focusing on the Middle Ages. These newsletters are published either monthly or seasonally throughout the year. They include news and upcoming events, reports on events attended by group members, essays on little-known historical facts and periods, gossip, recipes, poems, illustrations, occasional advertisements, and jokes. Hand-drawn cartoons may lampoon the misadventures of certain group members, and the format of the newsletters often parodies more 'serious' mainstream publications.

As print media is of necessity unidirectional or non-participatory, these newsletters allow the re-enactors to share these forms of humour without the potential intrusion on social interaction which would occur if a member were to 'dominate the circle' in order

to recite them. Such jokes, in addition, often make the rounds among re-enactors through the electronic media of email, demonstrating once more that re-enactors, as I have argued, are not Luddites with a fear of technology, but rather use technology for their own ends in the creation of their alternative worlds. The creation and sharing of such worlds through newsletters and emails allow re-enactors, inhabitants of an increasingly bureaucratic postmodern world, to engage, in Alexander's (1997:127) memorable phrase, in "turning away from the serious business of non-authentic living." He sees irony as "an expression of a more generalizable feature of modern societies - what Gellner (1974) has commented on as the emergence of 'ironic cultures':

To take up Gellner's claim that 'serious cognition', led by bureaucratization, need not necessarily pervade all aspects of daily life, we can see the role which irony has acquired. It allows us to escape from the cognitive constraints which impinge on us from regimented social forces, and to return to the 'real world', so to speak. As Gellner (1974: 193) puts it: 'The world in which we think is not the same as the one in which we live, in Gaston Bachelard's memorable formulation.' Hence the feature of irony, coupled with related activities, such as jocular behavior and light-hearted banter, is a component in a socially shared facility for 'de-centring'... It is a conscious distancing process." (Alexander 1997:127)

Examples of both irony and parody appear in publications including those of two Edinburgh groups. *Feudalist Overlord* (a spoof on the *Socialist Worker*) and *The Blether* - 'blether' being colloquial Scots for gossip or chatter - are both medievalist newsletters. Both text and illustrations are often humorous. Articles are written in a casual style, aimed to amuse as well as inform. In one example, a Lecturer in Medieval History at Canterbury Christ Church University College had contributed an article on medieval grooming and hygiene practices entitled 'Cleanliness in the Middle Ages (or, Help! My Gypon is Bismotered!)'. The article noted that Gothic warriors at the court of King Theoderic of the Visigoths dressed their hair with butter. The author then joked, "if there had been adverts for male grooming in fifth-century Gaul, they would have made unusual viewing... "rancid butter - because I'm worth it". This was a reference to a

television advert being shown at the time, featuring the actress Jennifer Aniston promoting L'Oreal hair colour.

The schedule of events published in one issue of *The Blether* (May 1999 Issue 6, *AS XXXIV*⁸⁸) admonished its members to arrive for an Easter event on time for the armour inspection and fighting:

You didn't travel all this way just to stay in your bed. No matter how enticing your companion, it just can't compare with the smell of sweat and leather, the feel of rattan⁸⁹ in your hand, and the adrenaline rush of charging through a castle gateway. (Or is that just us?).

This society stages events known as 'Warbands', in which rival teams of fighters attempt to 'conquer' a historic site - with permission from its owners, of course. The same issue of *The Blether* contained two pages promoting and detailing such an upcoming event, Warbands V (i.e. the fifth annual such event):

You've been around the camp fires, you've listened to the rumours about how good it is. You've seen the pictures and you've heard the 'no kidding, I was there' stories. Don't take anyone else's word for it, this is not a virtual event. Journey to the North of Scotland and revel in the full, three dimensional, Technicolor, surround sound experience. Smell the atmosphere, drink the whisky, chase the sheep and impress all your friends. Eight out of ten Peers say that they prefer this event. The autocrats are waiting patiently by the phone, so make that call, confirm that booking. Go on, you know you want to.

That was a crude commercial plug made by the autocrat who has pawned his armour to pay for the event. There now follows a more dignified message on behalf of the sponsoring shires of Egail and Harpelstane.

Knights! Squires! Men at Arms! and other ner'dowells

⁸⁸ I.e., the thirty-fourth year of establishment of the society.

⁸⁹ Being an SCA event, 'light weapons' of rattan or bamboo were used, although a 'Heavy Weapons Training' session was advertised "if there is sufficient time, for those with any energy left".

assemble thy companions and prepare for battle in, around and for the Historic Edzell Castle for a FIFTH year. The shires of Egaill and Harplestane invite you to form warbands of between three and five warriors and to put them to the test against the other bands and the castle's defenders. Individuals with insufficient friends or who normally play with themselves can either join a warband or be drafted to help the brave defenders.

Further instructions and information followed:

All SCA legal weapons are permissible. Archers must use golf tube arrows.

Pints (sorry, that should be points) will be awarded for Warbands with pretty tabards, with extra points being available for matching shields and banners. To further spice things up, certain individuals will have bounties placed on their heads with the rewards (in pints this time) going to the first person to kill them.

The feast hall seats a maximum of 80, so book early to avoid starving. All gentles are encouraged to bring personal banners to decorate the hall and as much of their humour and sense of fun as they can pack in a large hamper... Be warned, it has now become a tradition that if Royalty attend the event, they will call for entertainment from each of the shires present. So prepare your songs, stories, and acts of daring do. (*The Blether* May 1999:4-5)

Another newsletter is modelled as a spoof on the mercenary's magazine *Commando*. The Covenanting group's own version, *Condommo*, uses cartoon illustrations and spoofs of genres ranging from Hollywood hits like Tom Hanks' World War II film *Saving Private Ryan* to the cult television programme *Mission Impossible*. It relates humorous stories about members, their drinking habits, and past 'musters' (military gatherings to enact large-scale Civil War battles). The humour and drawings utilize those staples of peasant humour, gore, misfortune, and farting (Benton 1988), as well as

references to excessive alcohol consumption. Text is written in colloquial renditions of spoken (male) Scots dialect. One example illustrates the ‘hard man’ image typically employed in representations of working-class Scottish men. A re-enactor is shown in full 17th century armour, with a full-length pike being thrust into his eye and through his head. As blood spurts from the wound with the accompanying sound effects ‘poke!’ and ‘SPLOTCH’, the man calls out “Ooyah Fuck! stop yer bloody whinging ya wimp!”.



Figure 61 - typical humour - cartoon from 'Cheap and Nasty'

The subject of that cartoon also featured on the cover of an issue of *Cheap and Nasty*. The story was written in the style of a tabloid news article reporting a case of football hooliganism. Readers of the newsletter would know, however, that the ‘fracas’ referred to took place on a battlefield among ranks of men with 17th century Civil War clothes and weapons, rather than outside a pub or stadium with football scarves, bottles and chairs. This juxtaposition is interesting in that it places the re-enactors in a type of (subcultural) mainstream - like the so-called ‘football casuals’, they participate in organised fights with large groups of unknown men who, by their dress and supporter’s

chants, symbolically represent an opposing other . At the same time, by emphasizing the humour, self-deprecation, and above all the (largely) ‘staged’ or fictive nature of the ‘violence’ of their encounters, the re-enactors distinguish themselves and set themselves above these same football supporters. They are able to declare, “Look, the drinking’s for real but the rest’s “a f@&%\$ hobby! For fun!”

A small contingent of Fraser’s (Alasdair, Ian, Sarah and Paul) went (by National Trust arrangement – some not arranged then) to publicise the Fraser Gathering and where hustled out by Bon Accord security.

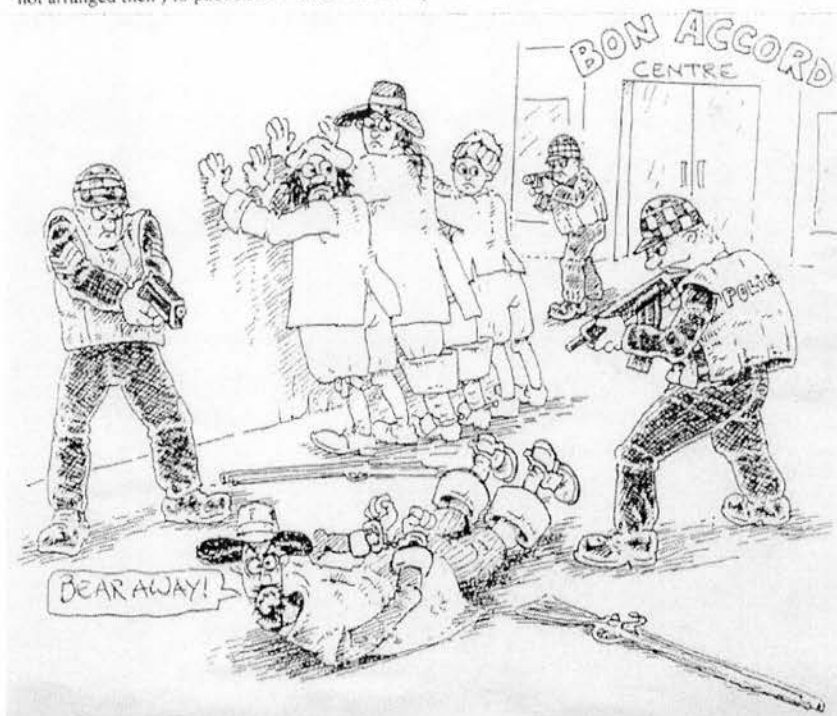


Figure 62 - An incident at Bon Accord shopping centre

In his analysis of the symbolic resistance in Apache joking about white men, Keith Basso (1979:26) writes that jokers succeed in “maintaining there with full awareness and quiet satisfaction a cultural system and a sense of tribal identity that are distinctively and resiliently their own”. He advocates viewing these joking “performances as little rituals of reversal and inversion, of denial and rebellion, of affirmation and intensification ...” for the purpose of “ridiculing the behavior and attitudes of Whitemen towards Apaches” (1979:60-61). Through humour strategies, and publications such as those described above, re-enactors attempt also to generate and defend a sense of identity against the potential criticisms of ‘mundanes’.

Re-enactors also share jokes via the Internet, including some which again show a deal of self-reflexivity. An example of a currently popular standard type of joke going around the Web at the turn of the 20th century are the lists of comical statements beginning “Signs that you’re a”. These may include, ‘Signs that you’re a computer nerd’ / ‘Signs that you’re a child of the 80s’ etc.” These are then followed by long lists of supposed characteristics of the group being targeted. The humour stems from being able to recognise, usually with embarrassment, some of the characteristics in oneself, thus classifying you as a “chocoholic”, “computer geek”, or what have you. Such a list sent to me was entitled “Signs that you’re a Re-enactor”:

You see the riot police on TV and start critiquing their shield wall.
People greet you on Monday morning with ‘So did you kill anyone this weekend?’
Bad fighting and / or costuming has ruined an otherwise decent movie for you.
You’re a burly guy who looks like a Hell’s Angel, but you do embroidery in public.
You can eat equally well with a dagger or a fork.
You have more kit than clothes, and the kit is in better condition.
You visit a period castle and can spot the mistakes in the tour guide’s lecture.
Your reference section on your field of interest is better than the equivalent section in the local library.
Your mundane friends wangle invitations for Sunday supper so they can sample the feast leftovers.
You pull out a wax tablet to write down someone’s email address at an event.
The gynaecologist asks ‘When is your period?’ and you answer ‘Early 14th century’.
You start wearing your tankard and belt pouch with your mundanes, because it’s so darned convenient.
You’re female and you’ve walked straight into a door on Monday morning because you just expected the co-worker you’re entering with to stop and open it for you.
After viewing this list, your mundane significant other chuckles for days, while you mutter to yourself ‘I don’t see what’s so funny about that’.

There seem to me to be two main themes or threads of humour in most of these ‘signs’. The first indicates the possession of superior, but admittedly sometimes pedantic or obsessive, knowledge or skills. Thus, the reader knows more than policemen, tour guides, or Hollywood directors. The other contrasts or juxtaposes the re-enactor with so-

called 'mundanes', or non-re-enactors (note the use of the word 'mundane' to refer to both 'mundane' friends or partners and 'mundane' clothing, i.e. modern 'street gear'). On the one hand, re-enactors have office jobs they go to on Mondays; they date; they have friends over for dinner. On the other hand, they might use a Roman wax tablet to write down an internet site or email address, and carry car keys and credit cards in a hand-tooled medieval leather belt pouch. The message is clear: they can, and do, move easily 'between worlds' - they are both at ease in a past world which is mysterious or inaccessible to 'mundanes', and in the present technological era.

No. 3189

65p

Condommo

FOR ACTION AND ADVENTURE

SAVING
DRAGOONE
FOR LIFE
STRACHAN



Figure 63 - A spoof of the promotional poster for Tom Hanks' 'Saving Private Ryan'

The Joke's on me

Finally, much of the humour employed by re-enactors is self-deprecating. They often subvert their own knowledge or status. An example of this is the 'device', or heraldic design, featured on the shield of the 'Champion of the Realm' of a local medieval re-enactment group: "on a field argent, a pale sable, a palette or, overall between three feathers a coney proper courant and regardant en arriere". While this might sound impressive, it translates as: "a black vertical bar against a silver shield with a golden plate set between three silver feathers, on top of which is a rabbit in its natural colours running away and looking back over its shoulder". The design thus indicates cowardice rather than heroism.

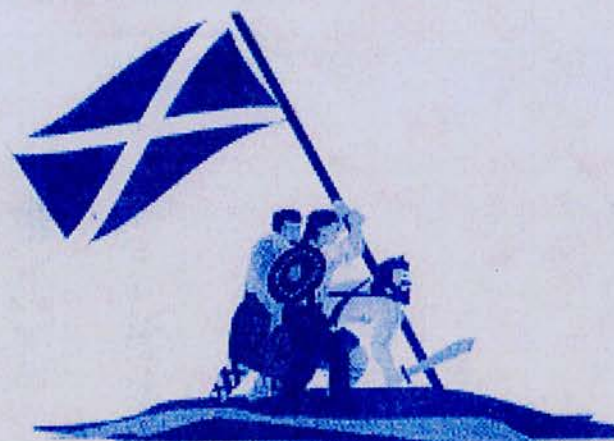
Another group participated in a BBC comedy video in which a bunch of men in motley mixed period bits of armour drive to a country pub, have a brief 'skirmish' in the car park, and immediately adjourn to the pub. Here they promptly bury themselves in their pints, getting ale foam stuck on their Viking helmet noseguards and Border Reiver face guards. Again, the re-enactors themselves lampoon those who say they became involved for 'education' but really use it as an excuse for a weekly pub jaunt and a bit of fun with swords. I believe re-enactors use such techniques of self-deprecation as a means of defusing criticism from others. As members of a larger society in which their pastime is often negatively assessed, such humour allows them to indicate that they don't take themselves too seriously: as the title of one group's newsletter says, "It's a *&^%\$# hobby! For fun!" Or as Victor Turner once wrote: "We human beings are all and always sophisticated, conscious, capable of laughter at our own institutions" (cited in Ashley:1990:xix).

Kennedy (1970:53) notes that:

From an objective phenomenological point of view, the world of play is no more artificial than any of the other of man's socially constructed worlds of 'reality'. It is called fictitious and artificial by scholars because it is conceived by the participants to be secondary, temporary, and voluntarily created by their mutual consent.

In conclusion, joking, teasing, punning, humorous anecdotes, and other forms of playing with words serve many ends: pedagogic, punishing, self-protective, self-promoting. Its 'choral' function promotes solidarity; at the same time it operates as a social corrective through inducing embarrassment. In addition, joking must be seen in relation to power and status, solidarity and social distance (Norrick 1993). Humour performs as 'boundary' by identifying an 'inner circle', and defines appropriate behaviour by ridiculing out-group propensities. It serves a 'coping' function in defusing aggression and distancing unpleasant facts. It is worthwhile pursuing the ways in which humour may paradoxically express aggression and rebelliousness while simultaneously building rapport and reproducing social norms, and with which it creates both distance and cohesion, pleasure and pain.

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Figure 64 - advertising poster for re-enactment event in Avoch, organised by local SNP

Reasons for Re-enacting

Chapter Ten: Nationalism - Saluting the Saltire, 'Flagging up' National Identity

Identity would seem to be the garment with which one covers the nakedness of the self; in which case, it is best that the garment be loose, a little like the robes of the desert, through which robes one's nakedness can always be felt and sometimes discerned. This trust in one's nakedness is all that gives one the power to change one's robes. (Baldwin 1993)



Figure 65- a ceremony in the Highland village of Avoch

In the last chapters I have attempted to describe some of the range of practices engaged in by re-enactors, and the ways in which they create and critique their own cultural productions. An increasingly large number of people engage in the work of appropriating the past, often at great personal expense, financial and physical. In this and the following chapter I will address some of the reasons why they do so. Clearly the desire to step outside of ordinary time and engage in play is a key factor. As Tuan writes,

After a prolonged submersion in this normal life, we wish an opportunity to put on an act, to dramatize ourselves and our world; we wish for a quickened sense

of life, which can be got vicariously by watching a performance - sports, play, and even a car accident. (Tuan 1990:238)

Play is not the sole motivation, however, and I believe there are serious processes at work side-by-side the ludic or 'escapist' elements. Re-enactments may in fact simultaneously declare 'let us play' (Arnoldi 1995) while whispering 'let us believe' (Handelman 1977). Indeed, different messages may be foregrounded. Through a process which Herzfeld terms 'semiotic bricolage' (1997), re-enactors, whether playful or earnest, build meaningful identities on both a personal and political level, through a heady mixture of nationalism and what might be termed nostalgia.

McKinney's recent study of folk music performances in Scotland revealed that:

Scotland as both a physical entity and a political process
resides at the core of most forms of artistic expression.
Cultural expression, in the current climate, is always
implicitly political even when it is not explicitly so. (1999:145)

Many Scots use the phrase "I'm nationalist with a small 'n', not a big 'N'" to refer to their political sentiments. This primarily distinguishes them from members of the pro-independence Scottish National Party, who are referred to as the Nationalists. These people may feel a strong attachment to the idea of a unique Scottish identity, and a pride in their nation's history, without sharing the call for a separate political establishment outwith the United Kingdom. According to several surveys reported in the popular press, the majority of Scots in the late 1990s felt themselves to be either 'More Scottish than British' or 'Scottish, not British'. This was certainly true of the re-enactors I met during my time in the field, an opinion backed up by the chief organizer of Historic Scotland's re-enactment events:

I think by and large most of them are nationalists, but... the problem with nationalism is, with the SNP for example, they've got this huge political spectrum, from right to left. Actually a bit like the Labour party... I think there are people in the Nationalists that are way far to the right... that's where you get the problem - they would all say they are nationalists, but if you ask them a range of questions, you'd get an awful barometer, in terms of what they're doing - I think it's a mix, but I think that they're political, but not party political. (Finnigan, interview)

There are two key reasons for identifying the performances of re-enactors in Scotland as nationalist, if not political. The first is the types of key historical events chosen as material to recreate. Most re-enactment groups were either founded to commemorate major battles in Scottish history, or are primarily asked to recreate these in their public performances. The battles selected can be seen as struggles to protect Scottish political sovereignty or religious identity: the Battle of Largs against Viking invaders, the Wars of Independence against Edward of England and his successors, the Covenanting or Civil War period against the imposition of the English prayer book, the Jacobite risings against the Hanoverian monarchs. Significantly, with the exception of Largs, all of these threats were posed by what Scots still today refer to as 'The Auld Enemy' - England. By electing to dramatize these moments rather than, for example, the massacre at Glencoe - an equally dramatic slaughter of Scots by Scots - or the deposition of Mary Queen of Scots by her half-brother Moray, re-enactors are, I argue, focusing on examples of external threats to Scottish well-being. These are unifying foundational myths, still referred to in football pitches as well as folk pubs around Scotland whenever the anthems *Flower of Scotland* and *Scots Wha Hae* are sung. Both songs, the latter by Robert Burns and the former by the folk group The Corries, refer to the battles fought by William Wallace and Robert the Bruce against Edward I of England:

Wha for Scotland's king and law
Freedom's sword will strongly draw
Free man stand, or free man fa'
Let him follow me!
- Robert Burns

While some re-enactors simply argue a personal interest in a certain period as the reason for choosing to portray it, others admit the political nature of their choices. As has been mentioned, one young re-enactor claimed that:

There's three main periods, three main battles, that we do. There are basically three battles that define all of Scottish history - Stirling Brig, Flodden, Culloden. One we won, two we lost. Glorious defeat. And that tells you everything you need to know about our history.

As Herzfeld has demonstrated, “[n]ational embarrassment can become the ironic basis of intimacy and affection, a fellowship of the flawed, within the private spaces of the national culture” (1997:28).

The second way in which the nationalist content of performances comes to the fore is through the comments directly made by the re-enactors themselves. Many told me that the chief motivation for their public performances was to redress, if not the perceived ‘wrongs’ inflicted on their nation by their more powerful southern neighbour, the lack, as they saw it, of a ‘correct’ or ‘complete’ knowledge of those conflicts and Scotland’s role in them.

I have used the term ‘nationalism’ rather than ‘ethnicity’ for two reasons. The first of these is the perception of the Scottish re-enactors themselves. Eriksen notes that ethnic groups “tend to have myths of common origin and they nearly always have ideologies encouraging endogamy” (1993:12). From an emic viewpoint, ‘Scottishness’ is not usually defined in an ethnic sense, as sharing a common genesis. Re-enactors, in fact, emphasize the multi-ethnic origins of the nation, including Vikings, Picts, Scots, Cumbrians, Angles and Romans. This is emphasized particularly in their choice of persona names: the Norse *Askillsdottir*, Anglo-Saxon *Egilfrith*, Cumbric / Welsh *ap Ieuan*, Norman-French *de Courcy*, or Gaelic *Padraig Macdubh*. In this sense, nationalist sentiment in Scotland tends to have a “polyethnic or supra-ethnic ideology which stresses shared civil rights” (Eriksen 1993:118). McCrone (1992, 1998) also points out that Scottish nationalism tends to prioritise both territorial connections and shared political ideologies over ethnicity.

Furthermore, Gellner has defined nationalism as a primarily political principle which argues for unified cultural and political boundaries: “[n]ationalist *sentiment* is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of this principle” (1983:1). This is not to say that all Scots, nor all re-enactors, advocate full political independence from the United Kingdom. Re-enactors however often like to stress that the various groups that settled in Scotland had been unified in a single nation at a time when England was a collection of

seven small kingdoms. They therefore exhibit what Eriksen (1992:6) defines as the “distinguishing mark of nationalism... its relationship to the state”. The widespread belief that a group of people who claim nationhood should by rights govern themselves is not limited to historical re-enactors, and can be seen exemplified in the vote to re-establish a Parliament in Edinburgh at the end of the 20th century.

Anthropologists have often been uncomfortable with, and critical of, nationalist movements they have studied. Jonathan Spencer (1996:393) argues that this poses an intellectual problem for the discipline:

This element of critique - which occurs again and again in recent ethnography, as nationalist claims to authenticity and historical rootedness are challenged and exposed - suggests that nationalism occupies a sensitive place in the anthropological collective consciousness. After all, most anthropologists are expected to take a charitable line on the deeply-held convictions of the people they write about, and it is unusual to find a political and social phenomenon subject to such unremitting criticism.

Lest it should appear that re-enactors are unusual in the level of their apparent grievance against their southern neighbours, it should be pointed out that this is a pervasive attitude throughout Scottish society, despite Scotland’s seemingly comfortable position within the Union. At most times, this undercurrent remains at a joking level. Certain events or images, however, will trigger anti-English outbursts even among the most successful establishment organisations and individuals. Recent examples include England’s participation in the 2002 World Cup. Scotrail’s train bosses sponsored a contest on their website asking players to predict how many minutes or seconds it would take BBC’s English commentators to mention their successful Cup victory of 1966. One of the major Edinburgh financial firms also sponsored a charity by asking contributors to guess how many goals would be scored in the game - and stating that “Goals against England count x 10”. Even the BBC’s counterpart in Glasgow, BBC Scotland, organized a game of ‘Cliché Bingo’, instructing its employees to listen to their fellow commentators in London and cross off their scorecards each time they heard a “tiresome old cliché” (Massie, *Scotsman on Sunday* June 9, 2002).

While some of these comments are intended to be tongue-in-cheek, others are strident. For much of the Scottish population, such sentiments remain dormant, and are only vented by football fans through the donning of Brazil t-shirts during England's match against the South American side. For re-enactors, however, they are expressed in reference to the border struggles and political machinations that characterised the relations between Scotland and England between the late 13th to 18th centuries. These 500 years cover the periods portrayed by most Scottish re-enactment groups. Whether key battles within this period are re-enacted because they demonstrate Scottish - English conflict, or whether re-enactors are disproportionately aware of such conflicts because of their focus on these periods of history, is difficult to ascertain. Evidence from the larger population, however, tends to support the former conclusion. It should be noted that this attitude is not unique to Scotland, however. As Davies has noted (1998), similar processes have taken place in relation to Welsh identity. Moreover,

... as victims, the Irish cite but a single malefactor - perfidious Albion. Centuries of bards have keened a saga of British iniquity and Irish grief... Accumulated animus embitters sovereign Eire seventy five years later (Lowenthal 1998:76-7).

Beyond the British Isles, Lowenthal (1998:75) argues, modern-day Israeli Jews, as well as the "[h]eirs of Albigenian Cathars, Highland Scots, Maori warriors, and the Warsaw Ghetto dwell on last-ditch stands that evoke the tribulations of Troy and Carthage". And on the other side of the Atlantic,

The vaguest details of their Hebridean heritage suffice Canada's Prince Edward Islanders. When their plight is likened to the Scottish Highlands after the Clearances, or Glencoe after the Massacre, it does not matter that few know what these mean; 'the mere sound of the words arouses a homing instinct, a feeling of belonging to something tragic but durable.' (Lowenthal 1998:135)

I did not meet with any re-enactors who chose to recreate the era of Scottish economic expansion during the 19th century, when the benefits of Empire flowed to Glasgow as well as Manchester and Liverpool. For most re-enactors in Scotland, Scottish history as

an individual entity ended, either with the Union of the Crowns and the Stewart monarch's move to London, or on the Battlefield of Culloden when Stewart hopes for the throne came to an end. Thus, time and again in public and private events, re-enactors, sometimes in hushed voices and sometimes heatedly, declared: 'Our history's been taken from us. We're taking it back'. One group in particular, who use a Scottish Gaelic name meaning 'The People', were overt in making this claim about their public performances, a typical example of which I will describe below.

Albannach

This was the first re-enactment performance group I ever met, several years prior to beginning my research. While on holiday in Edinburgh, I noticed two long-haired men on the Royal Mile dressed as 'Highlanders' - in what I later came to know as *breacan fheilidh*, or *fheilidh mor*⁹⁰ - one playing the bagpipes and the other handing out leaflets advertising a show. Interested, I took one and went to see them perform at the Royal Scandic Hotel, where they spoke about Highland culture and tartan, demonstrated how to put on the *breacan fheilidh*, and did some sparring with weapons. Speaking to them after the show, they revealed that they were soon to be involved in two upcoming film productions, about the 'famous Scottish heroes William Wallace and Rob Roy MacGregor', about whom at that time I had never heard. The films in question of course were Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* and Liam Neeson's *Rob Roy*. They also told me that they hoped to acquire some land where they planned to reconstruct an 'authentic 18th century Highland village' where they could live.

When I first embarked upon researching re-enactment, my thoughts naturally went back to this group encountered all those years earlier, and I made extensive inquiries about them. However, I met nothing but dead ends, and was told variously by members of the re-enactment community that they'd never heard of the group; it had split in two, or changed its name, or disbanded. One thing which immediately became clear was the

⁹⁰ the 'long kilt' or 'belted plaid': *breacan* meaning speckled, multi-coloured, or striped, and referring to tartan cloth; *fheilidh*, apparently meaning 'belted' or 'kilted', and *mor* meaning 'long'.

modern-day 'clan' rivalry which existed between re-enactment groups, especially those engaged in public performance.

Having spotted a picture in an uncredited photo montage in a tourist events brochure that I recognized as one of this group's leaders, I was able finally to contact the group in September 1998, travelling to Stirling Castle to observe their latest show. It soon became clear, however, that some members of the group were extremely uncomfortable with the 'ethnographic gaze'. Spotting me (out of a crowd of over two hundred audience members) jotting down notes, one of the actors came up to me to inform me that 'the performance was copyrighted' and their 'moves' couldn't be used without permission. Apparently I had been taken for either a Hollywood stunt fight choreographer or a member of a rival re-enactment group. Interestingly, the primitive technology of a small notebook and pen was seen as more threatening - reminiscent of a police officer, perhaps? - than the complete audiovisual recording of the performance by audience members - clearly tourists - with video cameras.

Unlike other re-enactment troupes I'd since met, Albannach were not in the habit of allowing audience members 'backstage' after performances, and the rope safety barrier, set up to keep the audience separated from the actors, was kept firmly in place. After the show, hanging around this barrier rather like a theatre groupie, I was finally able to convince another group member to ask their leader, 'Mungo', to come chat. Mungo didn't remember me, but seemed vaguely to remember the incident I mentioned which had taken place some five years earlier, when his two sons took an American woman tourist (me) on an impromptu tour of some of the catacombs beneath Edinburgh's Royal Mile, to which they had gained access after knocking a hole in a back closet wall in a basement flat they were staying in!



Figure 66 - Albannach perform at Stirling Castle. Note women and children in background.

I asked Mungo about the planned reconstruction of a Highland village he'd mentioned all those years earlier. He explained that the project had been dropped, attributing this, slightly defensively, to a lack of finances. I initially assumed that he meant that it proved too expensive to purchase the amount of land needed to build an entire village.

Surprisingly, however, he was referring to the salaries necessary to pay re-enactors to live there. I had imagined when the project was first mentioned that it stemmed from a desire to 'return' to an earlier way of life in actuality, rather than to create a heritage venue for the purposes of tourism. Mungo mentioned that even if you paid a minimum wage, and had only ten people stay in the village, "at £15,000 pounds a year, that's already £150,000 pounds, plus expenses: the land, taxes, utilities". It seemed to me then that I had misunderstood what the group were seeking to recreate - they did not want to 'get back to the past', but to make a paid profession of staging of the past, but with all the modern comforts behind the facade.

There had seemed to me to be a running political undertone in the anti-English ‘jokes’ and anti-British state remarks made by group members as part of that day’s show. During the course of our conversation I mentioned that the performance seemed to have a nationalist subtext, and asked whether that was intentional. Mungo responded that “We are nationalists”, but then insisted “but we’re not political” - we have nothing to do with the SNP”. He also complained that the government should support them financially:

In any other country the government would pay us for what we do, but the British state [*this last phrase was emphasized with disgust*] doesn’t like us - they’re afraid of what we represent - they want Harry Lauder⁹¹ shortbread tin stuff - not a guy with a great big sword.

I had been told by someone who’d known Mungo years before that Albannach had planned to make the ‘Highland village’ an ‘English-free’ area, and if so it is certainly unsurprising that the government wouldn’t agree to finance this as a tourist enterprise.

When I explained that I had been seeking for several months to re-establish contact with Albannach, but had had trouble locating them, Mungo remarked that they rarely make public appearances any longer, concentrating on corporate bookings,⁹² and mentioned that “we’re not even breaking even here today”, implying they were doing the show at a loss as a favour to their sponsors at Historic Scotland. Although Albannach overtly state that ‘cultural reclamation’ is the main aim of their performances, it appeared that both political and financial motives were equally powerful.

Speaking in tongues

I travelled to watch Albannach perform at venues in the Highlands, on the Isle of Bute in the Firth of Clyde, and the Central Belt. In contrast to other re-enactment groups, most

⁹¹ Harry Lauder was a singer of popular Scottish tunes during the early part of the 20th century. He had a following as far afield as the U.S., but was roundly derided by many late-20th century Scots as a purveyor of all that was embarrassing about Scottish identity - tartan, shortbread biscuits, and ‘heedrum hodrum’ music - accordion-accompanied polkas and the like.

⁹² The Bank of Scotland, The *Scotsman* newspaper, and Edinburgh City Council’s Hogmanay Events, have all used the services of this well-known group.

of the men of this group were not bearded, with the exception of their leader. They did wear their hair long, however, flowing past the shoulder. All of them wore tartan plaids in muted colours, in the *fheilidh mor* or 'long kilt' style, with full-sleeved Highlander shirts in rough unbleached woven linen with laced-up, open-fronted collars. In contrast to the modern kilt, or 'philibeg',⁹³ the *fheilidh mor* is not cut and stitched, but is made of one long piece of woollen fabric which is pleated by hand and belted around the body. Traditionally, this piece of cloth would have stretched to between 12 and 18 feet in length, and about 5 feet in width. The cloth would be laid upon the ground and gathered up in pleats along the long edge until it had been reduced to about 4 - 5 feet in length, at which point a belt was tucked under it crosswise. The wearer would lay on top of the pleats, face up, and then bring the sides of the folded material around his body and fasten the belt to keep it in place. The pleats would fall to about the knee, and the excess fabric could be brought over the shoulder and fastened in a variety of ways, for example, as a 'rucksack'-like pouch for carrying shot game, or over the head as protection from the rain. As a part of their show, the men in Albannach would demonstrate how this was done, generally asking for a volunteer from the audience - during the shows I attended, always a woman or a child (interestingly, as this same group had objected to a woman's wearing the *fheilidh mor* at the Culloden commemoration).

At first glance their re-enactment 'camps' closely resembled those of other re-enactment troupes: a cluster of canvas tents, rough wooden stools, tables and benches around a campfire, usually set towards the back of the field on which the performance would take place. There were several women, wives and girlfriends of the male members, and children, in the camp. But here the resemblance ended. In Albannach's shows, the women and children never move from the tent area, remaining a silent backdrop to the men's performance. After one performance, I met a woman in the group, smoking 'off-scene'. When I asked if there were many women members in the group, she answered "Yeah, but mostly 'cause our men are involved - we don't do much". Seeming slightly embarrassed, and apologetic, she added: "It's a bit sexist, but I guess that's the way it

⁹³ 'phili' is the English rendition of *fheilidh*, while 'beg' is Scottish Gaelic for 'small', as contrasted with 'mor', meaning 'large'.

was back then”. This was notably different from the attitudes and beliefs of most re-enactors I met during my time in the field.



Figure 67 - A 'captured redcoat' soldier

Other differences also struck me: in the arched stone entrance to Fort George, an active British military base, the group had hung a cylindrical iron cage containing a mannequin dressed as a 'redcoat soldier'. Upon closer inspection, the rubber dummy was badly mangled, covered with fake blood and partially 'chewed', with one eye dangling from its socket. It was the type of amusing gore one often finds in 'haunted houses' at fairs or carnivals, or at the popular London or Edinburgh Dungeons. What struck me about its location here, however, was its anti-English theme (although strictly speaking, the uniform of *British* regiments, 'Redcoats' is a common term in both the U.S. and Scotland for 'English soldier'). This was surprising given the origin of many of the tourist visitors to the show. Furthermore, there was the anachronism of the cage itself. It

is known that Edward I imprisoned victims in such cages, exposing them to death by the elements and the ravages of birds - as happened, it is said, to many of the inhabitants of Berwick upon Tweed when the town finally fell to his forces. There is no evidence however of such devices being used by either Redcoats or Jacobite Highlanders during the period being portrayed in Albannach's show, the mid 18th century. Given the experience I had had with so many re-enactors, to whom anachronism was anathema, this was an unexpected item with which to 'set the stage' for audiences approaching the performance field.

A similarly 'gory' effect was produced near the camp cooking area. Here, a large wrought-iron cauldron, suspended over a tripod, and a grill had been set up over a log fire. Large haunches of raw meat were suspended on hooks over the cauldron. These were both 'display' objects, and would form part of the group's meal at the end of the day after the audience had returned home. Nearby, however, in niches in the stone wall behind the cauldron, were placed 'human skulls', one still complete with its helmet. The juxtaposition of 'human remains' and cooking implements seemed staged to produce an effect like that of visiting the Edinburgh Dungeons themed amusement exhibit. As there is no evidence, to my knowledge, of cannibalism practiced by Scottish Highlanders, this seemed a clear example of borrowing from the entertainment industry rather than representing 'Highland culture'.



Figure 68 - A cooking pot. Note the human skulls on the wall behind.

After seeing several performances of this group, it became clear that they followed a very regular and scripted pattern. The narrator, 'Callum', a young man with flowing blonde hair, always began his address in Gaelic - but then stopped suddenly in mock surprise:

Callum: Are there no Gaelic speakers here? [very slight pause]
Then we'll have to use the enemy's language - English.

This last was said with a tone of disgust - to what seemed to be the embarrassed amusement of the audience. I suspect this to be a combination of the fact that most Scots in fact do not speak what some believe should be 'their own' language, as well as, possibly, the worry over the risk of offending a large English tourist presence.

‘Callum’s’ narration then continued, describing a Highland culture, including the playing of bagpipes, the wearing of kilts, tartan, and *sqian dubh* knives, all of which, “even the over-the-shoulder, crossed belts worn by Highlanders [gesturing to his own wide leather belts] were banned by the Act of Proscription after 1745”. All of these markers of Scottish Highland identity, he declared in ringing tones, had been “proscribed by the government in London”, and he concluded with the statement that “we aim to redress that, and do away with the tartan shortbread image”.

Much of the group’s performance was quite humorous, but also rather politically laden. Some of the anti-English remarks at times had a bit of an ‘edge’, and I was reminded at one point of Evans-Pritchard’s remark about his discovery of pseudo-authentically sullen ‘natives’ - that a group which was perceived to be subordinate might ‘act out’ its resentment to oppression in stereotypical, and almost scripted, fashion, exhibiting a type of agency in their assumption of and flaunting of this role.

For example, when demonstrating the modelling of the *fheilidh mor* they always advised their volunteer to “assume the English position when faced with a Highland charge” - and demonstrated by putting both hands straight up in the air, at which point they would wrap the pleated tartan around the ‘model’s’ body. Throughout the performance, references to the English were made, variously claiming them to be vicious or sneaky, or conversely cowardly, weak and effeminate - as they said, ‘poncy’. To prove this latter point, English soldiers and officers were claimed to be overly refined and dependent on heavy armour, huge cavalry horses and lots of troops backing them up, in contrast to the hardy, self-sufficient Highlander. When demonstrating the ‘shiltron’ pike formation, Mungo stated that “Some think the Highland army was undisciplined, but they needed to be brave and disciplined to stand and wait for the charge of English warhorses”. Interestingly, despite this claim, the group constantly showed ‘Highlanders’ arguing with their chiefs, bickering with each other, and changing sides in a conflict, for the sake of humour, which is more obvious in this group’s shows than in any of the other public performances I witnessed.

At another point Callum offered to a female audience member: "I'll teach you to fight like the English", holding the sword out in a silly and effeminate way, one hand extended with a drooping wrist while mincing about on tiptoes. Another actor then 'cut her throat' from behind, claiming that this is the "English method" of attack.

Humorous 'jabs' at all things English were again apparent during another group fight scene when one re-enactor 'stabbed' a 'rival clan' member from behind: "Cheat, cheat!" another called out; "that was your English move!". When a gun misfired the same man ad-libbed, peering in mock perplexity at the side of the muzzle, "Look, it says 'Made in England!'"

It struck me that much of the explanatory dialogue was distinguished by 'English v.s. Scottish' oppositions, including the description of the Highlander's basket-hilt⁹⁴ sword, in which the narrator commented, after describing the double-edged blade, "that's the English part of the weapon, now we come to the Scottish part: the basket hilt." Using a fellow re-enactor as a 'practice dummy', he demonstrated, with quick feinting jabs, that the open-work metal filigreed hilt, as well as wrapping around and protecting the hand, was used as an offensive weapon: 'it could be used to crush an opponent's skull or break the top of his spine' [swiftly spinning and bringing the hilt down fiercely at the motionless 'dummy's' body but stopping short of making contact], "while the built-in hook could catch and break your opponent's blade or twist his weapon away, disarming him for the kill" [while explaining this, the demonstrator had spun and parried an 'attack' by another member of his group approaching behind him with drawn sword].

The group advertises itself primarily as 'a team of professional fighters', "the best in Scotland", they claimed, mentioning to me that they compete with fighting teams from around the world, and were undefeated in Europe. It is therefore probably not surprising

⁹⁴ 'Basket hilt' refers to an elaborate guard which wraps around the swordsman's hand, acting as protection from sword slashes and also serving as an offensive weapon in close quarters: the hilt, which often terminates in a ball or spike, can be used as an iron 'boxing glove'. The basket hilt is often beautifully decorative as well, usually of a lattice design to keep the weight of the sword lighter.

that there is a strong militaristic feel to the performance - there are no elements of 'living history' aside from the explanation of how to don a traditional long kilt - no women from the group appear in the performances, and there is no discussion of social life. Women are brought in from the audience as volunteers, however. Once a young English woman was brought from the crowd of tourists to demonstrate how she would 'attack' a formation of Highlanders holding Lochaber axes (long pike-like weapons). One of the re-enactors had asked the audience to suggest a method of attack, and chose the woman when she called out "from behind". Remarking "ah, with an English accent as well! come down and try it!" he called the woman forward, asked her name, then told her "We're going to try your sneaky backstabbing idea". Putting a sword in her hand, and shouting 'attack', she was quickly 'defeated' when the entire line reversed pikes and turned on her. After she dropped the sword, one 'Highlander' picked her up, slung her over his shoulder, and was told, "Take that back to the tents, we'll have it later". I was reminded of a comment by Wallace (1985), who has argued that in their efforts to commodify the past, heritage theme parks such as Disneyland effectively candy-coated darker aspects of history, such that, in the Pirates of the Caribbean ride for example, "the robot pirates are agreeably wicked and the robot women seem to enjoy being ravished". This is true also of the popular shows put on by Albannach, where the audience laughed in amusement as the young woman, reduced to an 'it', was carried off.

On another occasion a little girl of about 10, Megan ("a good Celtic name", the re-enactor had said when bringing her from the crowd), was used to model the 'long plaid'. The narrator was explaining that Highlanders often removed their clothing to fight, to make sure they were unencumbered by the heavy folds of woollen fabric, which could easily catch sword blades. Grabbing the length of tartan above her shoulder and swinging her about, he suggested she demonstrate how Highlanders went naked (to a chorus of 'ooh, er!' from the other re-enactors). The narration was carefully scripted, and this joke was always used at this point of the demonstration, along with ribald laughs - (I did not see a male audience member chosen for this 'dress-up' portion of the show) despite, apparently, the age, appearance or reaction of the female 'model'. The only alteration I noticed was the suggestion that this young girl could carry

‘schoolbooks’ in the rucksack-like loop of fabric at the back of the ‘long plaid’, while a teenage girl was told that she might carry “small weapons, bits of wood, makeup”. Here again, the humour was still gendered, and often racy and innuendo-laden, as when the narrator, when having a mace swung at his private parts, jokes “no-one has a chink in their armour there!”. When one member received audience applause for an over-done, ‘hammy’ stage death, another called out, “Thanks for giving him the clap he deserves”.



Figure 69 - the Albannach women make no contact with the audience.

Other lines were also repeated in each show: one long-haired and bearded fighter was always referred to as ‘Billy Connelly’, another tall, red-haired man as ‘Ginger’. When a young lad of about 8 - the son of the troupe’s leader - ‘defeats’ a key fighter, he pipes up to the older man: “You should be picking up your pension, not a sword!”. When a bald fighter taunts long-haired Connor as ‘Goldilocks’, he responds “yer just jealous!” After calling out an order in Gaelic, at some point Connor always scolded one re-enactor in mock irritation: “I said, ‘with the dirk!’ - he’s still working on his English” - this last was an aside to the crowd to prove Gaelic ‘authenticity’ and deny Englishness.



Figure 70 - Albannach Highlanders clash

In contrast to most of the other re-enactment groups which put on public performances, Albannach's re-enactors frequently 'break period' or indulge in anachronistic humour. Such remarks might be either scripted, or spontaneously generated in response to circumstances or the audience, and involve stepping 'out of character': when one actor left his claymore in the tent and had to go back for it, Mungo quipped "in a couple of hundred years' time he's gonna be a plumber" to big laughs from an appreciative crowd [the reference being to a British stereotype, that typically workmen such as builders and plumbers often 'forget' important tools in their van, thus lengthening the amount of time it takes to complete the job at hand, while costs go up as they waste time in retrieving them].

On another occasion, the group's leader was talking about the defeat at Culloden 'by the English' (the participation of many Scots on the side of the Hanoverians is never addressed in these performances). At that point one of the 'Highlanders' stepped forward, lifted his clenched fist in the air and, facing the audience, called out "But we

won the Battle of Bannockburn”, spurring them on with gestures to join him in a cheer - which was greeted by a roar from the crowd: “YEAHH!”. At this point the narrator, feigning annoyance at being ‘upstaged’, also spoke in a direct aside to the audience, rolling his eyes and saying, “You can tell he was out at the pub last night - he’s forgot the script!”. The ‘suspension of disbelief’ necessary for real drama is thus interrupted; the performers openly admit that ‘this is not real’, and moreover that they exist in the same time and place, the same world as the audience - a world of pubs, rehearsals, scripts, hangovers, and mistakes. This was not the only acknowledgement of the ‘staged’ nature of the event: one man, who often played the ‘funny character’, avoided a huge battle axe during a fight scene, and ran away claiming “I’m not given a big enough raise to get hit by an axe that big!”, whereupon Mungo responded “Get him, admitting that to the audience!” This serves, I believe, to emphasize the members of this group as performers, and even as ‘celebrities’ in their own right, rather than as ‘ordinary’ people situated in the past, separated from the audience by the barrier of time, as is more typical of the public presentations of other living history or re-enactment groups.



Figure 71 - Members of Albannach are invited to parade through the streets of Rothesay for the town's 700th anniversary of incorporation as a royal borough.

Lack of authenticity was sometimes punished, however, especially lapses by newer members. After one skirmish, when a 'dead' Highlander's body was dragged off the field, revealing what he was wearing under his kilt, this man was repeatedly kicked by senior group members shouting "He's wearing boxer shorts!". The troupe has a hierarchical organization, and several older, slightly overweight men and two quite young ones were pointed out to me with the explanation that they were 'associate' rather than 'full' members. These men seemed rather peripheral to performances, and also came in for a larger share of taunting or criticism. When the two young ones sparred, the remark "public school boys!" was called out disparagingly by a senior member as a slur on class identity as well as age. When one of them was 'slain', his 'dead body' was kicked by several of the leading re-enactors with the remark "So Die All Tories!" We see here a commonly made claim that the only 'real' Scots are working class, 'Red Clydesiders'⁹⁵. After this, one of the tormentors bent over and explained quietly to the 'corpse', 'and it's not even because you're from Manchester'.

'Ranking' seemed to be based on fighting ability, not age, however: when an older, rather fat 'associate member', wrapped in bright modern plaids and sporting a feathered blue bonnet, took his turn to fight, another dominant member called out "Look at him, half-man, half-biscuit tin!" - a reference to the rock group with a similar name, but also to his waistline and 'shortbread tin' attire. A variety of things came under criticism, ranging from youth to social class, physique, taste, and political leanings. It seems this public humiliation is a method of expressing dominance and keeping new members in line, a bit like American college teens use modified 'torture' in fraternity initiation rituals.

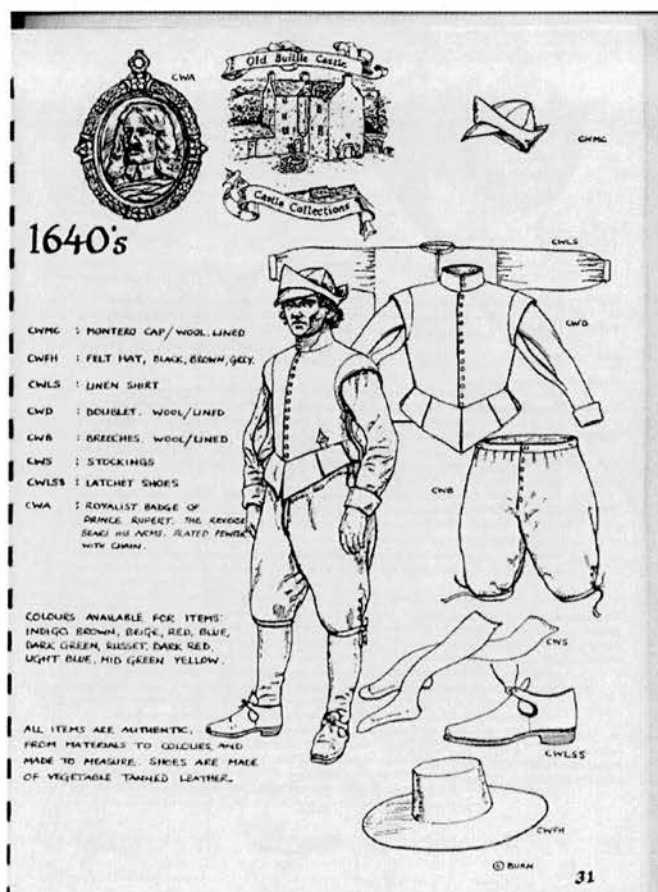
⁹⁵ A reference to the shipbuilders in the docks of the Clyde river, known for their strong trade unionism stance.



Figure 72 - Albannach's camp – or is it Edinburgh Dungeon?

There is no doubt about the popularity of this group, who are highly in demand, as mentioned, for corporate sponsored as well as tourist events. They are very successful in ‘playing to the crowd’, not least through their use of humour. Albannach claim that the ‘redressing’ of negative Highland stereotypes is the key motivation behind the group’s existence and performances. They had nonetheless succeeded in giving graphic suggestion that the Highlanders of Scotland were fractious misogynists, rapists, and even cannibals! It seemed to me, having observed changes in the group’s performances over an intervening period of some years, that they had originally formed for idealistic reasons in a sincere attempt to explain aspects of Highland Gaelic culture. The commercial pressure of conforming to a tourist hunger for ‘Disneyfied’ heritage (Wallace 1985) displays had resulted, however, in a very different final product than I believe was originally intended. As Peacock has demonstrated, “audience composition, rather than ideological background of actors or sponsors, affects performance content”

(1968:45). In order to ascertain whether private-performance groups retain more control over the content of their cultural constructions, I will examine some of the longest-established re-enactment groups in Scotland, those who portray what is usually referred to as the English Civil War.



Roundheads and Royalists



Figure 74 - The hand-embroidered flag bears the inscription, 'For Christ's Crown and Covenant'

Societies which specialize in the “faithful interpretation of the life and warfare of the English Civil Wars and the 17th century”⁹⁶ are some of the largest, as well as oldest, of re-enactment groups. The Sealed Knot, or Society of Cavaliers and Roundheads⁹⁷, for example, was founded in 1968 and has over 6000 members in branches throughout Europe. The English Civil War Society, divided into The Roundhead Association and the King’s Army, is over two decades old. Both of these organizations are structured along military lines, and divided into regiments and brigades under the command of officers bearing the ranks of Major, Captain, Sergeant, and so on. I did not become a member of any of these organizations, in part because they have strict regulations regarding giving interviews to members of the press without clearance from senior

⁹⁶ Quoted from the Rules of the Roundhead Association (Abridged)

⁹⁷ Cavaliers, or Royalists, were supporters of King Charles I and the monarchy; their opponents, advocates of Parliamentary rule, were variously known as ‘Roundheads’ (for their close-cropped Puritan hairstyles) or in Scotland, ‘Covenanters’ (for their adherence to the *Scottish National Covenant* of 1638, and the treaty agreement with England, the *Solemn League and Covenant* of 1643, advocating freedom from interference with their religious beliefs).

officers, and were unclear as to how to classify me in my role as academic researcher. They were kind enough to invite me along to several social events, however, and I was invited to speak to participants in their homes and provided with newsletters, pamphlets explaining the history of the groups, and other publications.



Figure 75- A Covenanter captain drills his soldiers in the pike

I first contacted the Commanding Officer of the Aberdeenshire Dragoones after seeing an article in a local newspaper about a recent recruiting drive. After establishing communication by letter and phone, I discovered that the regiment’s ‘skirmish season’ was over for that year, but was invited to attend their end-of-the-year regimental banquet at Castle Fraser northwest of Aberdeen. It was immediately clear that, like almost all of the private-performance groups I had met, a great emphasis was placed on strict 17th century period accuracy, not only in costumes but in ‘feast gear’ - eating utensils and drinking vessels of horn, pewter, wood, or pottery. Another flurry of letters and phone calls followed as my partner and I, who had only just begun to acquire our own medieval ‘kit’, were supplied with the necessary clothing and goods. Soon this was arranged, and our tickets for the banquet and ceilidh arrived, complete with a depiction of armed men

in long kilts and Scottish bonnets aiming long-barreled guns at an oncoming enemy. Aside from the location, price, date and time of the feast, the tickets stated:

*Overnight Crash at Castle. Bring a Bowl and Utensils.
Nae Refunds.*

Thus, both text and illustration emphasized a Scottish identity - the kilts, knitted tams, the expression 'nae' - and, if not a military belligerence, then a certain 'hardness' - in the men's stance and the brusque instructions: "overnight crash"; "bring bowl".

I made the long trip to Aberdeenshire then with a certain amount of trepidation. Knowing we would have to sleep on the stone floor of the castle, we had brought sleeping bags and mats as well as utensils and clothing. The castle lay at the end of a maze of winding country lanes, and we pulled into what had once been a stable yard, now filled with the vehicles of the re-enactors. The feast event was held in a low-ceilinged, barrel-arched stone room on the ground floor of the castle, which looked as if it had once been a kitchen or stable. At the end nearest the door a large wooden trestle table had been set up, supporting huge wooden casks of *Fraoich* (Gaelic for 'heather ') ale. Heather Ale is a Scottish company which has revived traditional folk recipes for ales, including one containing heather blossoms, one made of pine, one of gooseberries, and even one of seaweed. These ales are extremely strong, and were very popular among many of the Scottish re-enactors. A bearded man was decanting the cloudy liquid into tankards made of leather sealed with pitch-pine tar on the bottom. On the wall behind the man serving was a banner with a rendition of a Pictish stone carving, showing a man on horseback lifting what I thought was a hunting horn. The man pouring ale assured me, however, that it was a drinking horn, not a hunting horn, the figure held: "That's the oldest pub sign in history!" he claimed.

Along the length of the wall on another wooden table were displayed some beautiful examples of embossed leatherwork: sword belts, powder horns, and other period items, as well as bracelets and hair clips and women's handbags, all with Celtic or Pictish-style designs. These were made by a dramatic-looking man who called himself Carlos. Despite the Spanish name, and dark looks, including long shaggy black hair, he was

English, but was wearing full Highland gear: folded kilt, full shirt, crossed leather belts, bonnet with pheasant feather. He told me he was from Yorkshire, but was wearing the tartan of his wife's family, which was the 'correct' or 'authentic' way of adopting Scottish dress, he claimed. While jokingly referring to me as a 'colonial' because of my American accent, Carlos also spoke to me of the irritation he experienced over what he felt was at times an anti-English attitude among some of the Dragoones, and which clearly bothered him. As a group, however, I found the Dragoones very friendly and welcoming, interested in my research and eager to talk about it.

We had kindly been offered 17th century clothing for the feast, and I wore a long white cotton undershift, and heavy blue woolen overskirt and bodice, which had to be laced up. I had decided to add my own accessory to the outfit: a plain brass cross I'd brought with me, but this, as it turned out, was a mistake. I'd failed to realize that this group, being Covenanters, were very anti-Papist, and received several mock-horrified reactions to my necklace! My partner, meanwhile, was in knee breeches and thick woolen socks, and a heavy laced-front jacket over a cotton Highland shirt, along with a woolen bonnet, all in the same blue wool as my own dress.



Figure 76 - an example of women's dress of the Covenanting period

The tables were set up in a horseshoe, with the senior members & 'officers' seated at the head table at the top of the room. The barrels of ale and serving table stood alone towards the bottom of the room, and we were seated along the outside of the left 'leg' of tables. The food was served by passing down one's bowls to the foot of the table, where various courses were dished up and then passed back. You had to recognize and recover your own dishes as they passed back up again! Platters of bread were spread along the table, and this was useful for cleaning out your bowl between courses, which were all served in the same vessel: soup, meat, vegetable and dessert. The meal was rustic, but hearty, and good.



Figure 77 - a Covenanting preacher blesses the meal

During the evening, many speeches were made, firstly by Gordon Alexander, a giant bearded man, who was the regiment's Commanding Officer. Next, another officer stood up and spoke about Gordon, who was credited with a large increase in membership and activity in the preceding year and received cheers and applause for this accomplishment. Finally, a man dressed as a minister or preacher, dressed all in black with a broad-brimmed hat, gave the homily over the assembled group, speaking in a sort of religious cant (he had also reacted to my cross, chastising me for wearing 'idolatrous symbols').

Also, many awards were given out for distinguished service in the preceding year as well as promotion in rank. There was a very military theme to the proceedings, not surprising for something that is billed as an active “17th century regiment”, and much ribald joking, and commenting on various members, some of whom were kidded that ‘no one thought they’d EVER win promotion’.

It was not only military awards that were distributed, however, and not only men who were recipients. Some of awards took the form of silver medallions strung on ribbons, and the woman sitting across the banquet table from me, and her teenaged daughter, each received one. I chatted with them about these, and also about their costumes, complete with lovely lace collars: the woman had made both her own and her daughter’s. As a whole the group seemed very family-oriented and there were many married couples, some with grown children who were also members. It was clear that an effort was being made to reward and acknowledge the women’s contributions to the group, despite its ostensibly military nature.

I later spoke with one of the women, Sharon, at some length. She commented to me that she felt that “S.K.⁹⁸ is weighted towards the English, even though many of the most important battles actually took place in Scotland”. She argued that Scots had been shunted aside by the English, firstly in history books, and now in terms of re-enactment performance events, many of which were staged in England and required a lot of long-distance travelling for the group. Another couple, Douglas and Beth, also approached at that point and joined in this conversation, commenting that:

Why is it called the *English* Civil War? It began and ended here in Scotland. All the key events took place here... but the textbooks are all written in England. So Scottish history isn’t taught... we have to write our own history.

⁹⁸ The group The Sealed Knot is often referred to by its initials.



Figure 78 - Frasers' revellers enjoy heather ale

Many of the members who spoke to me during the event expressed similar feelings of being overlooked, and needing to reclaim their place in history - and indeed, such opinions may have led 'Carlos', the English Highlander I had met earlier, to believe himself to be ostracized and prejudiced against. There was one main theme to the remarks being put forward by the re-enactors: that Scotland had been treated badly by its nearest neighbour, first of all historically, and next in the reporting of that history, and last but certainly not least from their viewpoint, in the re-enacting of that history.

After the meal had finished the trestle tables were cleared away for the ceilidh⁹⁹. A piper provided the music, and the entire assembly joined in and sang many of the songs, which also had a notably patriotic element: 'Flower of Scotland', 'Bonnie Dundee' and 'Ye Jacobites' were some of these. I was given a printed sheet of lyrics to sing along, but

⁹⁹ A gathering which features traditional Scottish music and dancing similar to North American 'square dances' - pronounced 'kaylee'.

I found it interesting that the group had emphasized detailed 'period correctness' in so many aspects of the feast: food, utensils, clothing, seating and serving arrangements, even conversation - and yet seemed unconcerned about such matters when it came to this point in the evening. I believe that the significance of the communal singing lies both in its bonding function and in that it allowed participants to express their identity through strongly marked, even nationalist, Scottish songs. It thus assumes many of the same functions that an emphasis on 'authenticity' does in other aspects of re-enactment, removing the participants, momentarily, from the 'mundane' world and into a state of *communitas*. In the 'subjunctive' mood which I believe characterizes much of re-enactment, Turner (1990: 11-12) argues that "the mood of maybe, might-be, as-if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire, depend[s] on which of the trinity, cognition, affect and connotation (thought, feeling or intention) is situationally dominant." When the Dragoones and other re-enactors were engaged in large-scale public displays, I believe that the third aspect, intention, is in force: the desire to 'redress the invisibility' of Scottish history which is so often expressed. On this intimate occasion, however, it seems clear that emotion or expressive feeling are predominant.



Interestingly, Turner's own interests in theatre, Scotland, and nationalism, were all closely interlinked. His mother, an actress, was one of the founding members of the Scottish National Theatre in Glasgow in the 1920s, and he describes himself as a child as a "fervent Scots nationalist" stranded in the "deep south of England, Bournemouth" after his parents' divorce (1982:7). He contrasts the nationalism expressed in Scottish theatre, however, with its Irish counterpart: "Scots Celts, tainted by Norman and Calvinist forbearers, could not emulate the heady nationalist eloquence or stark political metacommentary of an Ireland struggling to be free" (ibid).

Throughout the 20th century, performers attempted to explore their place in the world through the production of dramatic forms. Such productions often served as an 'escape valve' for an oppressed class or people, and in the communist countries of Eastern Europe, for example, both intellectuals and 'the masses' could express national and political identity through theatre (Huxley & Witts 1996). The accessibility of the past as

a resource may make it potentially dangerous to political elites, but may also act as a 'safety valve', allowing conflicting voices to 'speak out' through the medium of drama:

the multiplicity of historical traditions that emerge both in the theatre and in other social contexts underscores the range of diverse pasts available to people as they forge their identities... These competing traditions are not viewed as misrepresentations or distortions of some objective historical truth; rather, their very diversity underscores the dynamic processes at play in the production of historicity (Arnoldi 1995:133).

Re-enacting performers in Scotland seem to range from what they themselves term 'soft nationalists' - i.e., proponents of a distinctive history and cultural identity - to advocates of political independence and active Scottish National Party members. The first group often express their beliefs through statements about Scottish identity, which is almost always contrasted with Englishness (Davies 1998). History is not the only resource used to construct these oppositions: differences in civil and property law, in the 'kirk', or Church of Scotland vs the Church of England, in currency, sports teams, architecture, are all commented upon to illustrate Scotland's distinctiveness. For example, one re-enactor was explaining to me that Scottish laws lapse if they are unenforced for a long period of time, but claimed:

Do you know there's an ancient law still on the statute books in York that says "All Scotsmen to be driven from York upon pain of death"?! Barbaric country, where laws aren't even revoked after 300 years! I'd like to stand in the center of York and dare all challengers to take me on: "Im a Scotsman, ya buggers - whaddya wanna do about it?"

On another occasion, 'Hrolf' described a trip down to England to attend a re-enactment event. Earlier in the day, he had gone to a Royal Bank of Scotland branch in Peterborough, where the cashier had refused to accept Royal Bank of Scotland Scottish pound notes! Stopping at a petrol station to refuel, he tried to pay with 2 twenty pound Scottish notes, but the attendant objected. Exasperated, Hrolf related, "I told him, the petrol is in the tank. This is sterling. What do you want to do?"

Frequently, then, remarks made by re-enactors focus on a national identity which they perceive as marginalized. Occasionally, however, re-enactors are also political activists

and engage in campaigning for local branches of the Scottish National Party along with their 'living history' pursuits. One of the West Coast re-enactment groups actually had several SNP members, one of whom was convener of the local branch, one an election agent, and one had stood for local council elections for the party and done very well. She told me that her background was as a ranger, and she had been trained in heritage interpretation. Part of her campaign platform, she said, was to develop a visitor's center to promote the area's rich local history in order to attract tourists and stimulate the depressed economy in the area.

SNP activists were also behind organizing the annual North Rising celebration on the Black Isle, north of Inverness. This was established to commemorate Andrew de Moray, who had raised troops throughout the north of Scotland and fought alongside William Wallace at the Battle of Stirling Bridge. In the early 20th century, I was told, a local historian recorded de Moray's contribution to the famous Wars of Independence, but "it was published in 1914 just at the First World War and was kind of lost". A second edition came out in the 1930s and was discovered by a local minister. As the story was related:

... the minister in Avoch, he realised what a central part we had in the whole story, and they arranged a march up Ormonde Hill to the top of the castle rock and planted a flag, set a tradition going. Well, this was lost after the Second World War, but a few other things happened, particularly Scotland's political, um, rising, shall we say, in the 1970s, which rekindled the idea. And a couple who live here in Avoch set up these marches under the auspices of the SNP. It had fallen away again in the 1990s, but when it came round to realising it was gonna be the 700th anniversary [of de Moray's military uprising] we got together a project which allowed us to have a major march, have a re-enactment, and make sure every year something happened... and that work will go on, until it's in the curriculum of the schools, until people in the north here work harder to celebrate, not just a local hero, but a national hero...Everyone's heard of Wallace now, but de Moray really got the boy started off! But *Braveheart* really helped us, because it got the message out there, and people know now... events like this help people sort of find out about who they are and get stuck into the struggle... and the word's getting out, we've got a website, people are starting to know about what Andrew de Moray did, and that's especially

important in this new political climate... over a hundred people turned out today, and people come and stand in their gardens and watch as [the parade] goes by - they feel it's part of the community's life. Indeed, there's an agreement through the community council that the next street that's built will be called Andrew de Moray street.

Most re-enactors do not have a 'rosy' view of the past. They know their 'ancestors' were not without flaw, that they were often tyrannical or inept, that Scottish history had its share of corrupt lords and intolerant religious fanatics. Nor do they generally blame the 'auld enemy' (England) for unpalatable aspects of Scotland's own history, but rather for interfering in the flow of that history and its own internal dynamics, and most importantly, for forgetting. As one 'Jacobite Highlander' put it: "They tried to take away our identity - and they failed, by the way - and then they just forgot we were here".

It seems clear that nationalism, in many forms, is one of the chief motivations which lies behind the desire to recreate history. As Arnoldi (1995:131) writes,

To a large extent, people's sense of themselves as a group... is based on their perceptions of a shared past. These pasts can be differently invoked and interpreted, depending on the social occasion and upon which group controls historical expression. People consider the past to be a rich and authoritative cultural resource.

But the question must be raised, to what extent is nationalism itself a form of nostalgia, a longing for a pristine and unattainable time of purity? To answer this we need to attempt a definition of nostalgia, and the authentic moment, in the final chapter.

Reasons for Re-enacting

Chapter Eleven: Nostalgia and the Holy Grail of Authenticity – 'Let us Believe'

Common to both (authority and legitimacy) is the idea of coherence, that the meanings, mundane and transcendental, of one's life experience should cohere in some intelligible pattern. What modernity has done - in its drive to enhance experience, in its repudiation of tradition and the past, in its sanction for the new and the idea that the individual could remake his self in accordance solely with desire - is to disrupt that coherence in the name of an unbounded self. The radicalism of post-modernism now drives the individual into the beyond. (Bell 1977:251-2)

Among human beings new cultural forms are continually created out of anything available and suitable to the material and intellectual problems confronted by members of the population.
Brackette F. Williams (1990:112)

Objects of Power

McCracken's (1986) intriguing proposition is that goods serve the function of a symbolic or conceptual "bridge" to "displaced meaning", by which he means the individual or cultural ideals which, unattainable in the real world, we remove ideologically to a rosy future or golden past in order to preserve them from corruption. Goods associated with displaced meanings can, by their very physicality, become 'proof', or "objective correlatives", of ideals. As an example, he notes the sacred objects of millennial religions, or national costumes of an occupied country or culturally subjugated ethnic group. Displaced meaning may be written small, on a personal level, or more grandly on a national scale, but the 'evocative power' of objects serve both individuals and entire cultures to recover lost meaning.



Figure 80 - young audience members at Stirling Castle



Figure 81 - local press in Avoch re-enact the statue of Iwo Jima

If objects are bridges to displaced meaning, re-enactors, by surrounding themselves and immersing themselves in evocative objects, attempt to physically cross that bridge. In relation to objects, Stewart has argued that the development of global capitalism and its exchange economy, with its mechanical modes of mass reproduction, has led to an increasingly abstracted and mediated experience in which “the lived relation of the body to the phenomenological world is replaced by a nostalgic myth of contact and presence” (1993:133). Within this alienated existence, the need for ‘authentic’ experiences, made concrete and exemplified by ‘authentic’ objects, has led to our desire for the souvenir, the collectible item, imbued with memory. By situating memory within objects, rather than the body, however, we actually add to the distancing effect. She writes that:

“Authentic” experience becomes both elusive and allusive as it is placed beyond the horizon of lived experience, the beyond in which the antique, the pastoral, the exotic, and other fictive domains are articulated. (Stewart 1993:133)

Interestingly, Stewart cites Baudrillard’s formulation in his *Le Systeme des objets* that within the contemporary mythology of European society, mass-produced consumer goods are inherently ‘cold’ in contrast to the ‘warmth’ of the antique and exotic, which are associated with childhood and serve to “lend authenticity to the abstract system of modern objects” (Stewart 1993:146). Moreover, exotic objects from distant cultures are not only ‘warm’, but in fact dangerously ‘hot’:

Removed from its context, the exotic souvenir is a sign of survival - not its own survival, but the survival of the possessor outside his or her own context of familiarity. Its otherness speaks to the possessor’s capacity for otherness: it is the possessor, not the souvenir, which is ultimately the curiosity... such objects satisfy the nostalgic desire for use value at the same time that they provide an exoticism of the self (1993:148).

The objects created and used by re-enactors, I would argue, fall somewhere between the warm familiarity of the antique - that which has been safely handed down to us by grandmothers or displayed in shop windows - and the danger of the exotic. They, too,

speak of otherness - the re-enactor's capacity to enter a world which to most of us is only accessible through books or films.

Nostalgia and Longing

Nostalgia - how long has that been around? Can you imagine people sitting around in the Bronze Age, saying, "Aye, the Stone Age - those were the days. Them flint axes, the laughs we had" - 'course they didn't - 'cause they didn't have any language back then! The Bronze Age wouldn't be much fun because you could never really achieve; if you had the Olympics the best you could do was come third place because they only had bronze.
(Bill Bailey, comedian)

Susan Stewart has written extensively on the nature of desire and nostalgia and their relation to history. She perceives nostalgia in the sense of the emotional illness the word originally indicated, and writes that:

Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience (1993:23).

She argues that nostalgia is a narrative, and as such is always ideological and always constructed. Because the 'past' so created has never existed, it must always be felt as a loss. Historical time, like a river, springs from many invisible sources. The nostalgic's desire to find the one true origin, to enclose 'the past' in a completed and walled narrative, means that their task is doomed to failure and unrequited desire. She argues that

the prevailing motif of nostalgia is the erasure of the gap between nature and culture, and hence a return to the utopia of biology and symbol united within the walled city of the maternal. The nostalgic's utopia is prelapsarian, a genesis where lived and mediated experience are one, where authenticity and transcendence are both present and everywhere... where authenticity suffuses both word and world... Nostalgia is the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetition and denies the repetition's capacity to form identity. (1993:23)

Stewart argues that, ironically, the ‘everyday’ - that which re-enactors term the ‘mundane’ when referring to present time - when repeated over time provides quantitatively for the production of history, and qualitatively for authenticity itself. The paradox, however, is that “this temporality is held to be ongoing and nonreversible, and, at the same time, characterized by repetition and predictability” (1993:14).

Kathleen Stewart, in contrast, argues that the ‘seductive deceptiveness’ of nostalgia depends upon one’s point of view. While some cultural practices attempt to

construct codes of distinction and good taste - a pure aesthetic that is rooted in an ethos of elective distance from the contingency of the natural and social world...[others] refuse the refusal to engage... But the nostalgia of ‘others’ is not the good natured incredulity of a more natural people; it has its own ‘sophisticated’, or self-conscious, sense of its cultural constructions. The difference is that the desire is not to act *on* ‘the world out there’, but to act *in* a world that surrounds (1988:228).

This latter is descriptive of the way re-enactors actively seek engagement with the world in a ‘redemptive nostalgia’, “not with the intention to withdraw from life as popularly lived in the present but rather to produce active ways of being in it” (K. Stewart 1988:234).

One of the intriguing points Susan Stewart makes is that ‘lived’ history as it is experienced has neither beginning nor end, but that historians must make ‘sense’ of history by providing a narrative to it - an act which is ultimately ideological in its editing and choice of focus (S. Stewart 1993:22), and therefore also inauthentic. However, re-enactors attempt to recreate, not so much ‘History’ with a large ‘H’, the stories of famous people and events as written down or narrated, but ‘living history’, as they term it: the everyday life of past eras. Many re-enactment groups in fact prohibit members from assuming the ‘personas’ of historic figures actually known to have existed in the past.

Nostalgia, Stewart argues, is in fact a form of 'social disease' caused by the conjunction of two inherently contradictory assumptions:

First, the assumption that immediate lived experience is more 'real', bearing within itself an authenticity which cannot be transferred to mediated experience; yet second, the assumption that the mediated experience known through language and the temporality of narrative can offer pattern and insight by virtue of its capacity for transcendence (ibid:23).

Again, it is through the avoidance of narrative that I believe re-enactors attempt to remain within 'lived experience', an experience whose physical discomfort works to preclude nostalgia. However, the reliance of re-enactors on the creation and exchange of objects emblematic of the period which they portray is reflective of Stewart's argument, as well as of McCracken's (1988), that objects often operate as 'proof' of a distant, lost, or unattainable experience. Unlike many of the souvenirs that Stewart describes, re-enactor's objects are rarely alienated - they are made, either by the possessor, or often by someone the re-enactor knows personally or by reputation. They are in fact more similar to what she terms souvenirs of 'individual experience', which are usually not mass-produced and purchasable, but rather samples or scraps of little material worth, and often associated with rites of passage such as birth, initiation, marriage and death - such as quilts and baby booties, beach pebbles, pressed corsages, matchbooks, or cocktail napkins, photo albums or scrapbooks:

Because of its connection to biography and its place in constituting the notion of the individual life, the memento becomes emblematic of the worth of that life and of the self's capacity to generate worthiness... the sensual rules souvenirs of this type. The acute sensation of the object - its perception by hand taking precedence over its perception by eye - promises, and yet does not keep the promise of, reunion. (1993:139)

Certainly re-enactment seems an intensely sensual pursuit, not in the sense of luxury, however, but in terms of involving the senses, of physical embodiment. By immersing themselves in physical recreations of the past, the re-enactor also appropriates the function of the souvenir, and "moves history into private time" (ibid:138), thus allowing

access to an “experience impossibly distant in time: the experience of the family, the village, the firsthand community” (ibid:140). It does more than allow this communion, however:

The double function of the souvenir is to authenticate a past or otherwise remote experience and, at the same time, to discredit the present. The present is either too impersonal, too looming, or too alienating compared to the intimate and direct experience of contact which the souvenir has as its referent. This referent is authenticity...[t]he nostalgia of the souvenir plays in the distance between the present and an imagined, prelapsarian experience, experience as it might be ‘directly lived’. The location of authenticity becomes whatever is distant to the present time and space (1993:139-140)

The strategic attempt to revive a ‘golden era’ of the past is not a new practice. Stewart notes that antiquarian societies arose in the late 17th century, but were suppressed during the Jacobean period as a consequence of their ‘dangerous capacity to revive the political allegiances of chivalry, as they revived a more generalized taste for the chivalric past’. Similarly, the specific content of nationalism changed over time and space - nationalism became romantic nationalism in England, a veneration of pastoralism, decentralization, and a collective ‘folk spirit’ (1993:141). An antiquarian, she argues, seeks to both appropriate and at the same time distance the past - engaging in “an attempt to erase the actual past in order to create an imagined past which is available for consumption” (1993:142-3) - I would argue that this latter, distancing function is the opposite of what historical re-enactors try to accomplish. However, re-enactors do share what Stewart describes as the root of the antiquarian’s faith: “either the nostalgic desire of romanticism or the political desire of authentication” (ibid:140).

Ultimately, Stewart finds in the souvenir, or any object which symbolizes a distant, lost, or non-existent ‘other’ - another time, another place or people - a reflection of Lacan’s description of the symbol, which manifests itself as “the murder of the thing”, creating thereby an absence and an eternal state of desire (1993: 143). I would like to assess to what extent this accusation of murder is apt for re-enactment in general, and its audiences and manifestations in different performances in particular. Is it possible to

appropriate the past without causing its death - to satisfy a desire for the past without disguising it with nostalgia?

Historical traditions - 'Heritage', 'Fayres', and the contrast between Old World and New

In contrast to much of Scottish, or British, living history, many American re-enactments are about nostalgia - about romance, chivalry, and beauty. Although Civil War re-enactors seem to revel in grime and the grittiness of history, medieval or Renaissance 'fayres', for example, 'recall' a time which, for America, did not exist. For audiences as well, visits to re-enactment events, whether in North America or Britain, are primarily fun and nostalgic. For most re-enactors in Scotland, however, and I believe in Britain as a whole, the inclusion of 'uglier' aspects of the past - disease, discomfort, social inequality - separates this to some extent from escapist nostalgia of the type found in Disneyland (Wallace 1985).

A clear example of the operation of nostalgia, and its incompatibility with authenticity, might be the large events organized by the American-originating Society for Creative Anachronism. A recent invitation, received from a Scottish branch of the SCA, used up-to-the-minute technology - an email group mailing list - but phrased the description of events in 'pseudo-medieval' language. A brief segment of the text follows:

There is planned for your diversion and entertainment,
a tournament of fencing, a falconry display and then
heavy fighting. For those of a gentler persuasion,
we are hosting a fayre where merchants tempt you
with their wares. Refreshment is on hand in our tavern,
where you may also view the entries for the
Arts & Sciences competition...

This is typical of the type of linguistic style used in advertisements of SCA events, and of large-scale events in the United States such as the annual, and extremely popular, King Richard's Renaissance Fayres. The American events, in contrast to those in the UK, and in particular to those which are sponsored by organizations such as Historic Scotland and The National Trust for Scotland, focus more on creating a festival 'feel'

than a historical 'reality'. There is often a blurring, in such events, of medieval and Renaissance costumes, music, performances and themes; a general (and perhaps typically American) 'ye-oldey' effect. The American events often take place, Woodstock-style, in farm fields hired for the duration of the fairs, and are largely commercial entertainment enterprises. Clearly, in the United States, which has no direct connection to medieval European history, there is also no sense of sites of such fairs having their own history, their own 'story' to tell. The attempt to 'recreate' a medieval English village in a Wisconsin farmer's field is by its very nature false, artificial and inauthentic. However, individuals who research and recreate the musical instruments, dances, dishes, weapons, combat techniques, etc, may invest large amounts of time and money in accurate interpretations. There is therefore a potential for conflict between those engaged in the work of production, those who own the means of production (the sponsors who hire sites, provide capital, marketing, etc) and the consumers of the final experience, who may simply desire an 'easily digestible' product.

In fact, Sorensen's (1989) analysis of theme parks as 'time machines' poses the question of whether the public's nostalgic hunger for the past operates as a form of 'reminiscence therapy' in which physical, audible and 'smellable' 'realities' serve as a treatment for feelings of isolation and depersonalization. He recalls the disjunction of watching a 'beshawled peasant' at a folk museum in Ulster leave her turf hut at the end of the day and drive off in her motor car. The fact that we actively seek after the suspension of disbelief as we immerse ourselves in sensory experiences of the past may be a significant feature of our time, he argues, as revealing of our present civilization as the monuments of ancient Egypt are of the time of the Pharaohs.

However, Wallace (1985) calls the trend towards 'candy-coating' bleak historical realities "Mickey Mouse History". He notes, in Walt Disney's uniquely American slant on history, the "confectionery quality of Magic Kingdom's Main Street", creating a "cultivated nostalgia for a fabricated past". In opposition to the values of good old Main Street, USA, are the dark menaces of Frontierland, Adventureland and the Pirates of the

Caribbean. All of these historical “threats”- the savage Indian, the pygmy headhunters of Darkest Africa, the blood-thirsty pirate - are dead and gone, defeated by the bright and shining power of Main Street. All that remains now is for the denizens of Main Street to be kept entertained, at which Mickey Mouse history is very adept - “the robot pirates are agreeably wicked and the robot women seem to enjoy being ravished”. Wallace argues that this self-celebration is not merely innocuous leisure entertainment, but part of a denial of the historical realities of genocide, slavery and colonial oppression.

The prevalence of fantasy elements in American re-enactments of European medieval or Renaissance history is deep-rooted. American ‘Scots’ focus for example on the ‘romantic-tragic’ elements of Scottish history, such as the story of Mary Queen of Scots (Kantzavelos:2000). In contrast, this period seems to be assiduously avoided by the re-enactment groups I encountered in Scotland itself. It is interesting to note, however, that this was not always the case. Nick Finnigan, Events Manager at Historic Scotland, mentioned that in his first years in the job, this period was very popular, in fact “quite a strong icon at the time; Mary was quite a strong strand in the early stages” (pers. comm). Dr. Charles Jedrej mentioned early in my fieldwork that he believed Covenanting period performances in Scotland had seen their heyday in the late 1960s before ‘the troubles’ of Northern Ireland in the 1970s began to feel uncomfortably close (Charles Jedrej, pers. comm). I argue that the same process by which the story of the ‘tragic martyr queen’ became awkward, dealing as it does with uglier incidents of sectarian violence, so too the religious issues underlying the Civil War period may have become politically painful, if not incorrect. In their earliest incarnations, these [hi]stories were perhaps emblematic of Scottish pride, resistance, and principle: if not examined too closely, they seemed to resonate with themes of individualism, a unique Scottish identity, and independence upheld in the face of an external oppression (be it Elizabeth I of England or the King James Book of Common Prayer). In reality, though, these turbulent periods tell of intolerance and betrayal, just as much of Scot to Scot, as of any external threat. The more deeply one comes to know these aspects of history, the less palatable they become as a central feature around which to construct identity.

This is no less true of the Battle of Culloden, which saw the beginning of the end of Highland clan society. More Scots nowadays know that this was also not simply an English v. Scottish conflict, and that it also contained elements of sectarian struggle - Catholic and Episcopal supporters of the Jacobite cause against Protestant supporters of the Hanoverians. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is only one group I know of in Scotland which focuses primarily on this era.

In fact, in order to look for stories of unblemished, pure patriotic resistance against an external force, it is necessary to some extent to return to the era of the great pair of heroes, William Wallace and Robert the Bruce, or even earlier, to the incursions of Viking invaders to the coasts of Scotland in the 6th to 8th centuries. These two eras enjoyed popularity among both public and private re-enactment performers.

It then remains to be explained why some of the largest of all the re-enactment groups in Scotland do in fact concentrate on the period of the Civil Wars, or Covenant. I think there are two main factors. Firstly, these are the oldest and most established groups of re-enactors in Scotland, and indeed in Britain as a whole. Begun in the late sixties, these groups have long since reached the critical mass necessary to support and 'reproduce' themselves. Indeed, many members have grown up, met and married, and brought up their own children within the surroundings of a Civil War group, and those children are now older teens or young adults. Secondly, and perhaps as importantly, they do not dwell on, and often don't seem to acknowledge, the underlying religious conflicts of the struggle they recreate on the battlefield.

In fact groups are chosen, not according to which side one might have actually supported during the Civil Wars, but simply by accessibility and sociability - 'if there's a large group near me which allows me to 'do my period', and they're nice folks, then I'll join', seems to be the general sentiment. As one 'officer' told me in an undervoice (I was actually surprised that he found this necessary), "I'm Catholic myself - so I would've

supported the King back then... I guess I should've joined O'Neill's [a regiment of "Irish" Royalist supporters] but they're a bunch of bastards - this here's a great lot".

An interesting example of the denial of the sectarianism of the Civil War was revealed in an article by a young woman (Petford, 1994) who was herself a Roundhead re-enactor (in general, Parliamentary supporters tend to be referred to as 'Roundheads' south of the Border, but as 'Covenanters' in Scotland). She and a group of fellow members, still in costume, had just finished a staged battle 'skirmish' on the outskirts of a village. She was surprised that, upon entering a local chip shop, the Italian proprietor burst out with rancor, "Cromwell was a bastard!". She felt that he had, in some sense, crossed a line and shattered the 'reality' they were creating. What amazed me, in reading her account, was that she was unable to see that the chip shop owner was much more aware of, and living in, the reality of those very uncivil Wars. As a Catholic minority in a Protestant country, he was likely to be very aware of what, in fact, was an aspect of everyday life rather than living history for him.

It seems clear then that nostalgic desire is at play in many aspects of re-enactment, most particularly as it is performed in the New World, and consumed by audiences. Many re-enactment groups, particularly those which focus on the bloody Civil War period, could also be accused, if not of 'sugar-coating' bleak historical realities, then simply ignoring them. Other groups, however, arguably attempt to combat charges of sentimentality and nostalgia with what they see as their most potent weapon: 'authenticity'. It is only through convincing claims to a verisimilitude which extends beyond appearance to substance itself that re-enactors can lay claim to the contested territory of history.

The 'holy grail' of authenticity:

The topic of authenticity features frequently as a subject of articles in the re-enactors' magazine 'Echoes of the Past', which recently featured topics such as "The Authenticity Compromise" and the response in the following issue, 'Counter Blast to Machine Sewing'. In conversation as well, as I have demonstrated, it is used strategically to

evaluate other groups and practitioners, and it appears in invitations and instructions on events, as for example this recent email from Alec:

Authenticity:

This will be relaxed as there are not enough 14thc re-enactors to make the event totally accurate, however we will ask that there is no plate armour (grieves and vambraces an exception), large round or kite shields, blue face paint, kilts and plaids, etc... authenticity will come in the following years.

Concern with authenticity, extending even to serving vessels, food availability and recipes, is common even in private re-enactments. One re-enactor quoted me this rhyme to remember the advent of new foods and drinks from the New World and the Continent in the 16th century: 'Malts and turkey, hops and beer, came to Britain in one year'. She warned me with great earnestness to avoid at all costs buying wooden bowls - a typical item of 'feast gear' - at a car boot sale: "They might be teak!" she exclaimed. Concerned, as I was fairly certain I had at one time owned a teak bowl and fearing it was now known to be toxic, I asked her why I should avoid this. She answered with surprise: "Teak wasn't imported to Britain until at least the 19th century!".

Another re-enactor spoke with pride of owning 'blue salt glaze pottery and Bellamine ware - which is still made in Germany'. She told me that evidence shows that this elaborate ware was imported to Britain during the time period their group was re-enacting, but that this wasn't common knowledge, even among other re-enactors. Therefore, the speaker delighted in tripping others up with superior knowledge: "It's great fun to drink out of and get questions from 'authenticies'". On the one hand, this person was clearly concerned with true historical authenticity herself; but on the other hand she could laugh at others and characterize them with the diminutive (and perhaps diminishing) 'authenticies'.

Sometimes exceptions to verisimilitude are accepted, even by the most ardent advocates of perfect period detail. For example, during the Sealed Knot's Covenanter regimental feast held in Castle Fraser, despite the emphasis on authenticity which extended to the food, dress, and speech of participants, there was one visible anachronism in the room -

a man, in full period dress, in a modern stainless steel wheelchair. I was told that when the group participates in public events, sometimes travelling to the Continent, 'Jamie', who was disabled, would be taken in a small 2-wheeled wooden cart, and would sit at the side of the battlefield making bullets for the muskets. This, my informant explained, would have been true to life - there would be many wounded or disabled soldiers who made a living at whatever trade their skills allowed them.

On one occasion I spoke with 'Anne', a member of the English Civil War Society, who clearly valued authenticity, for example commenting about the rival S.K. group that 'some of its members are quite good and really research their period, but others are drunken louts'. But we also talked about the notion of 'taking authenticity too far'. She mentioned that Conner, one of the wee boys in their regiment's group, had a vision problem, and in the interests of authenticity, his mother wouldn't allow him to wear glasses. She worried that this was very stressful to the little boy, who really could not see well at all, and that this makes him quite nervous and excitable during 'musters' or weekend-long encampments. Anne she said that she herself struggles with the same problem, but tries to wear contacts when she goes to an event because otherwise she can't see at all and her modern blue plastic frame glasses wouldn't suit the period. She spoke of how much she would like to be able to find a good, 'period spectacle-maker'. 17th-century glasses, she explained, consisted of wooden frames - sometimes wire frames for people who could afford them - without ear pieces; they were tied on with linen tapes around the ears. Apparently as early as the Middle Ages, spectacles did exist, and she said she'd either like to get some or possibly have someone in the group with a stick, who's led around by a child as a 'blind person', because "obviously there would have been people back then with vision disabilities".

Interestingly, Ragnhild once showed me a video of some events staged by The Realm, including a medieval picnic held one autumn at Craigmillar Castle. Some of the participants were not, to my surprise, in period dress, and I when asked Ragnhild about it, and she responded, "Well, this is the beginning of the year - you can't be too strict with new members, basically, if they're not comfortable with it, they won't do it".

There is a recognition, then, that too strict an adherence to rules of period authenticity may drive off new recruits, particularly in early stages of their re-enactment careers. She also explained how separate groups can be formed to accommodate different ‘standards’ of authenticity. For example, the group ‘Traprain Law’ had been formed by members of Ragnhild’s extended ‘household’, and others, as an offshoot of the ‘Realm’. As she described it, “Basically, we’re Realm members who are interested in authenticity”, her implication being that obviously, The Realm itself is not always as authentic as it should be.

Ultimately, ‘authenticity’ may be impossible to define, as it exists on several levels. Used in everyday conversation by re-enactors, it refers generally to verisimilitude, or what Handler & Saxton term ‘token isomorphism’ (1988). But as they point out, it exists, unexpressed by the re-enactors themselves but constantly sought, at the level of experience, a level which transcends appearances (Bartholeyns 2000) and eschews distancing practices (K. Stewart 1988). In the context of performance, Schechner argues that it can be achieved through practice, until behaviour becomes second nature, spontaneous: “Authenticity is a question of harmony / mastery of whatever style is being played...” (1982:43). Schechner reminds us of the simultaneously subjective and subjunctive nature of our performances: “animals are always performing what they are, while humans almost always perform what they are not” (ibid: 47). However, such ‘invented traditions’ need not be inauthentic or exploitative, he argues. ‘Restored behavior’ may “heal into its presumptive past and its present cultural context like a well-set bone” (ibid:53), adding to what he terms the ‘cultural gene pool’ which gives vitality, essential to social well-being, to a monolithic world monoculture.

Dangers of authenticity

It is clear that the ways, and levels, on which ‘authenticity’ is achieved to the satisfaction of group members and audiences, producers and consumers, requires complex negotiation. For example, the subject of religion might seem almost unavoidable when looking at Scottish history, given the importance of religious conflict in many of the most famous episodes of that history. It is telling, then, to note how often such

potentially 'explosive material' as religious subjects is not only ignored, but strenuously avoided, as I have previously described among groups re-enacting the Covenanting period. However, more creative ways of avoidance, while maintaining the appearance of historical reality, are also found. For example, when performances call for him to play the role of a medieval monk, Gunnar, an atheist, duly recites in Latin. However, the text he recites is a translation of Winnie the Pooh! This might seem an extreme violation of 'authenticity', but manages to retain the 'feel' of a medieval Roman Catholic recitation, because most modern observers are not able to speak or understand Latin. He also is thus able to avoid violating his own principles.

Ragnhild once mentioned that Gunnar expected members of the Realm to avoid 'any religious songs or recitations', as he felt that such societies are required to be all-inclusive, and 'religious content' might put off or exclude some members. The reality of group membership, however, was that most were 'lapsed' Christians, or neo-pagans, who themselves borrow heavily from Christian liturgy (as they often argued early Christian missionaries did from paganism). Many of these members wear crosses, rosaries and crucifixes as part of their 'garb' (while others commonly wore pagan symbols such as Norse runes or Thor's hammers!). I found it doubtful that any would object to re-enacting religious rituals in the context of recreating European medieval history.

It was interesting, therefore, when I returned to revisit old friends and attend a Crusader's feast in December of 2001, during which a new member, who had become involved in re-enactment in his native Germany, attended in the persona of a knight crusader. Guests at the feast had been asked to speak, sing or recite for the entertainment of the other feast-goers. This new member, a tall, blonde-haired young man, stood up in his white surcoat blazoned with a red cross - the symbol of a knight of the military order of the Templars. He proceeded to greet the assembled 'lords, ladies and members of the Realm' and explained that he was a knight recently returned from the Crusades in the Holy Land. He called upon those assembled to "join him in the cause of freeing the

cradle of our faith from the infidel”. His speech was eloquent, forceful, coherent, believable, and completely ‘in period’.

But this speech was set against the backdrop, in the ‘mundane’ world, of a world-wide ‘war on terrorism’ in which very similar imagery and language was being used by both sides to justify their actions. It was, therefore, perhaps not appropriate in terms of political correctness. I noticed that Gunnar appeared, to my eye, distinctly displeased and uncomfortable throughout this speech, despite its ‘period’ correctness or the quality of its delivery.

Later during the same feast, a first-time participant from Greece asked about techniques and styles of sword fighting. An Australian member, Grant, who had joined 2 years earlier, and who had also been involved in re-enactment in his home country, began to explain the stages of training that the Realm used. First of all, new trainees use wooden staves to learn the holds and moves needed. Later they graduate to using metal weapons with dulled edges, learning to ‘pull’ their blows. In contrast, Grant explained, “SCA uses padded weapons - wood wrapped with silver duct tape and foam - at full force. This results in a very different fight technique”, and those who use metal weapons often prefer not to fight with those who’ve trained on padded ones, because the latter have not learned to ‘pull’ blows properly when fighting with ‘real’ metal weapons.

The new visitor asked about the meaning of ‘SCA’, and was told that it stood for ‘Society for Creative Anachronism’, and that their historical re-enactments might be said to emphasize the ‘creative’ aspects. Grant laughed in agreement. He then explained that there was a spectrum of re-enactors, ranging from those who just did it for fun to those very concerned with ‘authenticity’. When I remarked that I had found disputes over authenticity to be common in re-enactment circles, he exclaimed, “That is SO true! With some groups it’s just - well, fantasy to put it nicely- and on the other hand you get the really anal ones. I think our group’s got the balance right, but we’re not too uptight about it.”

Grant also mentioned that a friend of his who is an SCA member complained that he'd had his request for a heraldic device rejected by the SCA upper hierarchy. (Just as in Scotland the 'Lord Lyon' must grant an applicant the right to use a new coat of arms, these heraldic devices must be approved by the leadership of medievalist re-enactment groups.) Despite the fact that this individual had researched the device and copied it from an actual heraldic shield in use at the time he was recreating, the SCA authorities decided it did not conform to *their* rules for heraldic devices. Grant complained that conflicting interpretations of and feelings about 'authenticity' were the biggest difference between groups, and also the most common reason for group members to leave, split off and form new groups.

Often the desire to fully recreate 'authenticity' is constrained by legal restrictions, health and safety concerns, or propriety. When one woman warrior, portraying a Highlander fighting on the side of the Royalists, was thrown to the ground during a fight scene, it was apparent that she was wearing Lycra bicycle shorts under her kilt! Despite the 'violation' of the rules of Highland dress, and the anachronism of the material itself, this was probably less of a trespass than would have occurred had the assembled audience, including young children, been graphically shown the actual gender of the performer.

Sometimes authenticity was sacrificed to practicality, pragmatism or economy. During the same performance, I noticed a pewter tankard on the wooden trestle table set up in the group's camp was engraved 'Souvenir of London', and featured Victorian and 20th century sites. One of the re-enactors picked it up, laughing, and pointed to the engraving, "look at this!". Katrin then joked, "It's a seer's mug - it foretells the future!" Another woman nearby then commented, seemingly affronted, "You're not going to put your authentic period tableware on that table!", before addressing a young boy in the group, warning him "don't lean on that - it's not meant to break yet". During the climatic battle scene, these comments became clear when two officers began to 'quarrel' over a card game, which led to a tussle in which one of the men was thrown against the table, which collapsed dramatically (as it had been intended to do), sending pots and tankards flying and clattering to the ground. While the camp was in disarray, troops from the Royalist

forces, who had been nearby watching their enemies' camp, chose this advantage to launch an attack. Due to the time commitment, and the expense involved in producing 'period' items, re-enactors are unwilling to risk damage to them for the purposes of a twice-daily performance.

'Authenticity' is particularly difficult to achieve in fight scenes, due primarily to the need to avoid actual injury, much less death, and also to the excitable nature of these events. I frequently saw performances when someone 'died' when they weren't 'supposed to', or conversely failed to 'die' when the script required it, leading to occasions when the 'wrong side' won the battle which was being 'recreated'. One of the most amusing examples of this occurred after members of largely private-performing group The Realm, whom I had introduced to Glasgael for the Avoch event, joined in one of Glasgael's performances for Historic Scotland at Tantallon castle at an end-of-the-year event. Alec had been explaining to the audience the advantage of the knight over the pikeman, although the latter's weapon was longer and therefore appeared more formidable. A skilled knight could usually duck in under a pike, grabbing it and disarming his opponent. He proceeded to demonstrate this, but not before taking a blow to the leg with the pike. His opponent, however, was Ragnhild - current Champion of the Realm by combat of arms, in her male persona as Arni Grimmson. Accustomed to regular combat practice in which participants tried to best each other, 'Arni' forgot the script, grabbed for her sheathed sword (an item an actual footsoldier would have been unlikely to possess) and swiftly defeated the knight, her sword at his throat. Both were remaining true to different interpretations of 'authenticity' - the one to the historical reality of the event being portrayed, in which the knight in question successfully defended the castle, and the other to the 'reality' of combat, in which events cannot be predetermined, as protagonists struggle to press home any opening. As the incident with the tankard demonstrates, objects - whether weapons, eating utensils, articles of clothing - are central to what re-enactors do; it would be impossible to stage a 'minimalist' re-enactment in the style of some contemporary theatrical productions. To recreate a period, one must first convincingly recreate its physical world.

Whose History is it, anyway? Heritage and the Contestation of 'Authenticity' on the Black Isle

... it is in the tension between the different forms of narratives, whether from academics, remembrancers, participants, curators, or commercial 'imagineers', that essential truths about ourselves are found.
(Kavanagh 1989)

What follows below is the description of an encounter between local 'amateur' historians in a small Highland village, and a group of outside 'experts', in this case, a group of re-enactors from the Glasgow area. I hope to highlight much larger debates revolving around the idea of heritage and its uses in constructing local identity, in enhancing nationalist political discourses, and in establishing expertise.

On the 29th of May 1999, Glasgael headed up north to Avoch, a small fishing village on the Black Isle near Inverness, where they had been recruited to help celebrate the 'North Rising'. The annual event, an example of what has been termed an 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawm 1991, Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), was first instigated in 1997, on the 700th anniversary of the raising of the Scottish standard by one Andrew de Moray at Ormonde Castle. Andrew de Moray is little-known in Scottish history, lacking the fame of Robert the Bruce or the recent Hollywood-inspired notoriety of William Wallace. Yet in this small village of perhaps one thousand residents, a concerted effort was being made to reclaim de Moray from the dustbins of history, and to reemphasize his links with Avoch, where de Moray's father, a powerful baron and chief Justiciar of Scotia, once had his castle. In order to do this properly, locals in the village have founded the Andrew de Moray Project, and have sought both outside funding and 'expertise' in the form of a group of historical re-enactors. Previously they had engaged the White Cockade Society, but as that Jacobite group were unavailable on this occasion, they had instead hired Glasgael.

I have earlier given a brief outline of the history of Avoch's North Rising Day and its associated ideas and activities, as they were explained to me by 'Rab', one of the

organizers. Andrew de Moray was the son of Andrew de Moray of Petit, who had lands stretching from the Black Isle to Banffshire, but whose castle stood on Ormonde Hill in Avoch. After the Battle of Dunbar in 1296, both father and son were captured, but the younger de Moray escaped and returned to Scotland, where, arriving in Glasgow, Bishop Wishart charged him with leading a rising by gathering men from his father's lands in the north. The inspiration for the local celebration and its recreation of the raising of the standard (the Scottish saltire flag) there was the rediscovery of the role of this local hero, de Moray, in the early days of the War of Independence, which Rab explained, "made people in the village realize that in order for Wallace to succeed in the south of Scotland the rest of Scotland had to be involved in the rising as well". Eventually, after his successes in the North, de Moray joined up with William Wallace and is credited with organizing Wallace's strategy at the Battle of Stirling Bridge, where de Moray himself was injured and died later of his wounds. The story of de Moray, for local people of the Black Isle, is not only of a glorious leader of battle who met a tragic end, but a story of lack of recognition, as de Moray then effectively disappears from the history books without mention of his contribution to Wallace's later successes:

Our man de Moray was taking castle after castle from here to Aberdeen, and William Wallace was rising in the south, the Earl of Carrick Robert Bruce was, uh, part of a rising in the West... this didn't last as long, the one in the West.

What is interesting here to me is the attempt not only to put the 'local boy', de Moray, in the 'thick of the action', but to downplay the contribution of the Earl of Carrick, later King Robert I, portraying him as just 'some guy named Robert Bruce whose rising didn't last as long'. The tension here then is not only between Scottish and English, but between the contribution of the people of the North of Scotland who feel their significance has been ignored, against the dominance of the south and west of Scotland at that time (Nadel-Klein 1995, 1997). Similar complaints often came up in conversation with re-enactment groups based in the southwest of Scotland, who argued that the great independence heroes and movements of Scottish history, from William Wallace and Robert the Bruce through the Covenanters and the national Bard, Robert Burns, all originally from their area, had been 'misappropriated' by the Central Belt of Scotland, so

that tourists and natives as well now associate the figures of Wallace and Bruce primarily with Stirling, and Burns with Edinburgh.

Interestingly, nothing now stands on the hill where the locals march, give speeches and raise the saltire, not even rubble or foundation stones, and I was surprised by this barrenness until a chance encounter with a Historic Scotland staff member in the week following the events described below. When I mentioned the North Rising to him, he revealed that he had a particular interest in identifying lost historic sites in Scotland, and Avoch in particular, and that documentary evidence as well as on-the-ground inspection had led him to the conclusion that de Moray's castle once stood, not at the crest of the hill overlooking the village where the North Rising ceremony now takes place, but further down the slope of the hill overlooking the sea, in an area now thickly wooded. Thus the site chosen by the modern-day organizers would also become a site of contestation, and possibly consternation, if historical 'experts' were to come forward with this information.

Peter Fowler (1992) has spoken of the "razor edge between use and exploitation" related to various utilizations of the past. Although he was mentioning specifically the economic uses of the past as engaged in by the tourist industry in Scotland, I find this especially apt in the case of the North Rising commemoration, where the razor edge was indeed so sharp that I found it difficult to decide on which side to locate the various actors involved.

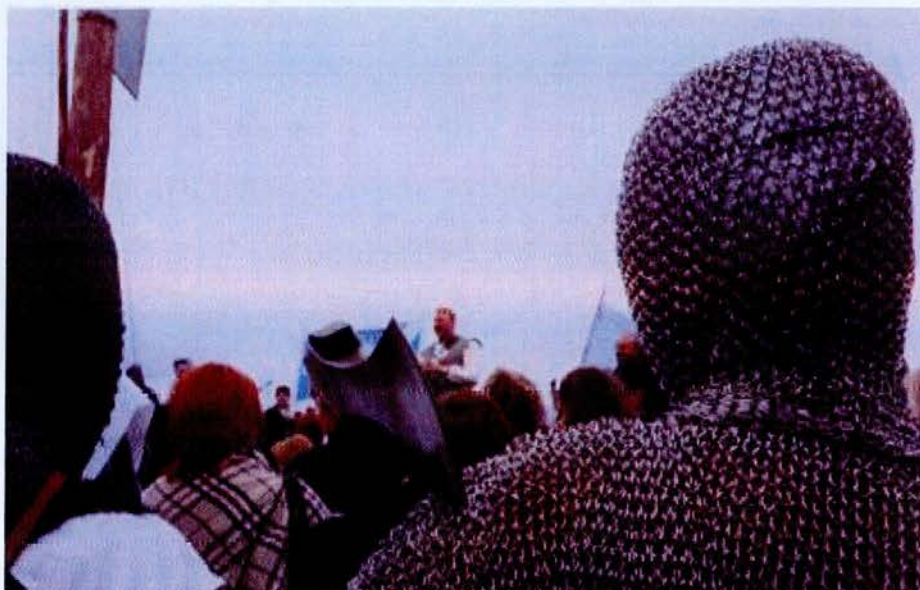


Figure 82 - Avoch village rally; chainmailed warriors shoulder-to-shoulder with tartan blankets and red wigs

The organizer with whom I spoke, Rab, was himself a prominent local member of the SNP, and the various levels on which the de Moray commemoration operates - as a source of materials with which to construct a local identity which struggles to contest a subordinate or invisible position within a larger Scottish context, and as a set of meanings which can be harvested in order to mobilize political action - deserves further exploration. Of greater significance here, however, is the contestation over the 'authenticity' or lack thereof of the images, actions, and materials used by locals to recreate their history in a way that was meaningful to them, in a manner which the outside 'experts' whom I accompanied perceived as, in essence, contaminated, artificial, false, uneducated or deluded.

Ethnographer in the Middle

Before I go on to describe the events of that day, I will explain my own involvement in helping to organize the re-enactment, which was to commemorate the taking of Ormonde Castle from an English garrison. A week earlier a meeting had been called by the leader of Glasgael, one of the two groups of which I had become a member, at his home in Port Glasgow. 'Glasgael' had been offered a 'show' in Avoch on the Black Isle, but because of the distance, and short notice, several of the re-enactors said they wouldn't be able to attend. During the course of the meeting, a crisis point was reached when it was realized that the group wouldn't be able to muster enough fighters to re-enact the taking of Ormonde Castle. The group's leader, Alec, would easily be able to portray the hero of the story, de Moray - he was a good swordsman, an able performer, had the correct period armour, and fortunately even his colours, emblazoned on his surcoat and shield, matched those of the arms of the de Morays. Only the heraldic device would have to be painted over for this event.

The group also had a suitable 'villain', Hal, to play the part of the local Scottish baron who had sided with the English governor, and a strong woman lead, Gwen, who usually performed the part of narrator at the group's shows, who had both the regal bearing and matching wardrobe to play the part of the Countess de Ross, who took the English garrison captives from de Moray in order to ransom her husband, held captive in Chester Castle by Edward's forces. The rest of the group would be needed to play the opposing Scots and English forces, even my husband being recruited as a lowly pikeman, while I was enlisted to step out of the crowd of villagers to fire arrows at the garrison once the attack had broken out. But the crucial part of the English governor had yet to be filled. It had to be someone who was a good swordsman, had the right lordly bearing, and a good speaking voice that could project unassisted out of doors - and hopefully, in a passable English accent.

The group was stumped, until I mentioned, rather hesitantly, that I thought I knew someone in Edinburgh who could fit the bill well. I was more than a bit worried at coming forth with this suggestion. My trepidation was due to the fact that reputation is

extremely important amongst re-enactors, and the man I was going to suggest is well-known in the Lothians and the north of England, and is the head of his own large 'household'. (I refer here to 'Gunnar', and of the practice of some re-enactors of establishing 'households' based on the medieval European model, complete with squires, servants, fostered children, priests, jesters, etc.). In my experience, the heads of various households, and leaders of re-enactment groups, often have very strong personalities, and strong opinions, which frequently lead them into conflict and ongoing feuds (albeit with wars of words rather than actual bloodshed). I was taking a risk that, firstly, Alec might have had previous, and possibly unpleasant, contact with Gunnar, or else that, if I arranged a meeting, one or both of the men might take a dislike to the other, thus possibly affecting my standing with both of the groups. Such discord often arises over many things - conflict of egos, disagreements over 'authenticity', always hotly contested among re-enactors, or over fighting prowess or style. Reputations are often made, or broken, not only over combat ability, but over more subjectively elusive qualities, such as 'honour'. In addition, one thing that made Gunnar suitable for the required role is that, although he settled in Scotland over a dozen years earlier, he is English. How would he feel then about playing the role of the invading English overlord of Ormonde Castle?

In the end, the phone call was made, the respective parties came to an agreement, and arrangements were made for members of both groups to meet at a farm on the edge of Avoch, where we were to be allowed to camp for the evening following the day's festivities.

After a 6 a.m. start and a four hour drive north through heavy rain, we drove around the small village several times before spotting the van, filled with re-enactors, their 'kit', and weapons, mired down in mud in the farmyard, while an angry bull in the nearby barn kicked at the barn wall in protest at our arrival. After a hurried conference with the farmer (one of the celebration's organizers), it was decided to relocate us to the community hall. We put down our bedrolls in the gallery above where the evening's

ceilidh would be held, and I looked forward to the luxury of having a roof over our heads and actual toilets and running water!

The conflict I'd feared between Alec and Gunnar never arose. They are both of the 'purist' school of historical re-enactment, in which materials, styles, techniques, etc, should all be meticulously researched, based on museum originals, and made by hand whenever possible. The 'authenticity conflict', when it arose, came from another direction, however.

After stowing our gear in the community hall we headed into the village itself, where we first encountered a peculiar miniature barbarian horde - local schoolchildren dressed in a motley array of tartan bathrobes, tartan car blankets, plaid shirts and strips of fake fur or hessian tied around legs and over trainers. On their heads they sported Jacobite blue bonnets, saltire-crossed hats as worn at football matches, and 'See you Jimmy' hats with attached false red hair. Many small faces, inspired by a noted Australian actor, were painted pale blue with white saltires crisscrossing their features.

The re-enactors who accompanied me were aghast. How could people purport to be celebrating their own 'history' and yet make use of such anachronistic materials and images, drawn from a late 20th century American media, specifically the Hollywood film 'Braveheart'? But things grew only worse. After all the re-enactors had arrived, we were brought by the local event organizers to pose for an assembled group of press photographers from both local and Inverness papers. They in turn led us to a small rise overlooking the village football pitch, where the knights and pikemen were given a large saltire and posed in such a way as to reproduce the famous American World War Two scene of the planting of the flag at Iwo Jima after a victory over the Japanese forces. This scene, taken from a photograph which I am told was itself staged several days after the actual battle, has become internationally recognized not least from its reproduction as a full-sized bronze statue commemorating American soldiers who died in the Pacific. Perhaps even more powerfully than the Braveheart film elements, this image seems to resonate as quintessentially 20th century, and unquestionably American.

It's clear at this point that the organizers of the North Rising Day were, to twist Bourdieu a bit, 'withdrawing their symbolic capital from a foreign bank'. As Brackette Williams has shown for the case of the Rum Tadjah festival in Guyana (1990), the struggle here as well was over the right to define the ideological basis of ownership, in this case of not of a Muslim Shi'ite rite but of an episode of Scottish history.

I would argue that at the center of the dispute was a desire to 'invest' this symbolic capital differently. For the people of the village of Avoch it was clearly an attempt to both 'flag up' and celebrate a sense of locality and of their own significance within a larger playing field. For organizers, who were primarily Scottish National Party members, it was additionally a political opportunity to motivate and mobilize, and to portray their own actions as part of an ongoing, indigenous tradition of struggle. For the 'metropolitan elite', in the form of the re-enactors who had travelled from Glasgow and Edinburgh, however, it was a chance both to demonstrate their own hard-won knowledge and expertise of a particular period in time, and to experience the 'authenticity' of this place which played such a significant part in the events of that history. For the re-enactors, whose fervor in their pursuit of the past at times made travel to the historic sites where their performances were held take on the nature almost of pilgrimage, the presence of the locals in their fake fur and tartan cloth finery was a violation of the importance of this place, and this event. Thus, in Brackette Williams' words, "charges of imitation, aping, illegitimate innovation, and other evaluations of cultural inauthenticity" (1990:114) were leveled at both organizers and participants.

The local people, for their part, however, felt equally violated, I believe. One aspect of their celebration, of course, was designed not only to celebrate local identity but also to reclaim significance for their own periphery from the dominance of the center, and especially of the Central Belt of Scotland. They were not impressed by the aloof outsiders who refused to get into the spirit of the thing, and were, in their own estimation, not even dressed for the part.

Matters came to a head at the end of the day's festivities, including the march, speeches, flag raising and historical re-enactment. Unlike the usual sequence of events when the re-enactors have performed at sites managed by Historic Scotland and the like, on this occasion the audience of locals had not gone up to the re-enactors after the performance to admire, enquire or seek out their expertise. On the contrary, when the re-enactors, some still in their armour and period 'garb', headed into the local village pub for a drink, they were largely ignored. Only one local resident spoke up to enquire, "Why are you dressed that way?".

This was the last straw in the eyes of the re-enactors. Some months later I received an email with the groups's new performance schedule for summer of 2000. At the end of the list was a message from Gwen, one of the leaders of 'Glasgael'. After mentioning that they had once more been requested by the Clan Hunter to do a show at Hunterston Castle, she concluded, "But we do promise that we will never do a show at Avoch again. Ever."

The vehemence, and one might almost say venom, of this dismissal surprised me. After all, we were well-treated in Avoch, given free accommodation, free entry to the ceilidh, even free beer! But at its heart, this was, like many disputes, a struggle over possession of a valuable asset, what Peter Fowler has called 'pastness as a resource' (1992), and to define the nature of the resource. For the locals, it was not perhaps 'history' in its pure form (as understood by, for example, historians or historical re-enactors) that was sought after, but its more valuable derivative product, heritage.

As Patrick Wright has pointed out in his 'Living in An Old Country', both nostalgia and heritage rely not on depth or 'truthfulness' of historical experience, because they are actually concerned with current realities. They revolve, he says, "around the leading tensions of the contemporary political situation" (1985:2). Heritage becomes part of identity when it becomes 'situated' in everyday life, a process in which story-telling plays a central part. Bruce Lincoln, in his 'Myth, Sentiment, and the Construction of Social Forms', writes about the construction of Swedish identity among his colleagues at

the University of Uppsala. In examining the narratives used to establish such identities, he notes that “references to the historic past were quite conventionalized and thus, after a time, highly predictable”. (1989:22) The stories evoked ‘stereotypical sentiments’, but Lincoln argues that this is the source of their effectiveness: “it is precisely through the repeated *evocation* of such sentiments via the *invocation* of select moments from the past that social identities are continually (re-)established and social formations (re-)constructed” (ibid:23). Writing on the sociology of heritage, McCrone et al argue that such narratives “rely for truth-status on authenticity rather than objectivity, on their plausibility rather than their veracity” (1995:31). Thus not only is the term ‘history’ contested here, but also the term ‘authenticity’ - Chambers defines ‘authentic’ both as ‘own, proper, entitled to acceptance’ - probably closest to its understanding among the villagers of Avoch - and ‘authoritative, of established credibility, setting forth real facts’ - the interpretation of the members of Glasgael. If such a seeming contradiction exists within the sedate pages of Chambers Dictionary, it is unsurprising to find it in the narrow streets of Avoch.

For the villagers of Avoch, as for the *Sogo bo* puppet performers in Mali, there was simultaneously both serious and playful intent, serving to “open up the dialogue about the past and the present, exposing it to scrutiny and commentary... mask[ing] any one group’s competing claims about authenticity, power, and knowledge” (Arnoldi 1995:187). Outside of performances, Arnoldi writes, “invocation of history is carefully controlled”, but by framing performances as ‘play’, “people invoke the authenticating voice of history to affirm their collective identity and explore their relationships with their neighbors” (ibid). For the visiting re-enactors, who ironically base their own pastime on the perceived need to wrest history from the hands of an academic elite, the locals’ attempts to make popular and political uses of what they see as their ‘cultural property’ were deemed impure, an adulteration of a resource of which re-enactors have endeavored to establish themselves as the trustees and guardians. There is also an intriguing inversion here of Schechner’s argument that “one must not forget the extremely active tourist promotion of performances. Most ... are sub-genres sharing qualities of condensation, simplification, and playing to audiences who want to be

entertained... In all cases, there is a double pressure: to be 'authentic' (a rotten term impossible to define), to modify what happens to suit the needs of the visiting group" (1990:49). In the village of Avoch, however, both locals and the tourists at the event seemed to share a desire for playfulness, colour, spectacle, and simplification; it was the visiting group of re-enactors for whom the pressure to be 'authentic' rendered this playfulness a travesty. As Peacock writes:

When it is strongly motivated by moral or political sentiment, the dramatic recreation of an historical figure can undoubtedly shape an audience's perception of the person portrayed... as dramatists and national rulers have always recognized, as a consequence of the human tendency to reduce complex experience to simple and easily comprehended patterns, myth... generally achieves more potency than historical fact (D.K. Peacock 1991:12-13).

The people of Avoch, through their invention of a tradition, exhibited an agency often demonstrated by re-enactors themselves, and intentionally sought to create a ritual which meaningfully conveyed their hopes and aspirations. The paradox of their creation is that it seems to conflate what Strinati (2000) contrasted as 'mass' culture - characterized as modern, commercial, mass-produced, American - vs. 'popular' culture, which he describes as 'authentic' and rooted in the past. The North Rising celebration incorporated elements of both - mass-produced 'Jimmy' hats with fake hair, painted faces copied from a Hollywood film - with actions which the participants perceived as located not just in any past, but in their own personal past. McDonald writes that interpretations of the past are "repertoires for imagining" (1997:21), for telling ourselves stories about ourselves: 'we have always been unique / freedom-loving / warriors / cosmopolitan', etc. Aesthetic judgments about the 'artificial' or kitsch nature of some of the symbolic forms exhibited by Avoch natives do not undermine their expressivity. Writing on cultural archaism in the bodily ornamentation and dances of WoDaaBe men, Bovin notes that "This self-exhibition of 'strange culture' is highly political, and can be used as a strategic weapon... extravagance is part of their cultural resistance" (1998:107). As Hughes-Freeland & Crain have noted, "Ritual is an increasingly contested and expanding arena for resistance, negotiation and the affirmation of

identity.... [in which] groups strive to determine their present interests and future identities by controlling representations that range from live performance to hypermedia” (1998:1).

In their studies of Civil War re-enactors in North America, Handler & Saxton (1988) found, just as I had discovered among my own informants, an overriding concern for authenticity. The attempt to perfectly simulate a particular object, scene or event from the past is referred to by these authors as ‘token isomorphism’ (1988:234). In another interesting parallel, they found that American re-enactors, like many of my own subjects, “explicitly devalue written history” (ibid), despite their frequent dependence on it in order to succeed in their task of recreation. Handler & Saxton go further, however, arguing that re-enactors also seek an experiential authenticity through their pasttime. They write that “for living-history practitioners, as for many of us, everyday experience is ‘unreal’ or inauthentic, hence alienating” (1988:234). Lowenthal explains that “the here and now lacks the felt density and completeness of what time has filtered and ordered” (1985:3). Re-enactors therefore seek to embed their own lives in the coherence of narrated stories, which exhibit seeming completeness and “holistic, multisensory engagement” (Handler & Saxton 1988:248).

Handler & Saxton believe that by ‘bracketing’ historical episodes and ‘appropriating’ historical personas in a generic form, re-enactors dissect the past rather than enter it, rendering themselves always distant, always reflexive, and engendering what the authors term ‘dissimulation’ (1988:253). Their findings, however, are based upon interviews with publicly-performing re-enactors - a method, I would argue, that forces reflexivity on their informants. I question whether their conclusions would be the same had they focused on private re-enactment performances and proceeded, not by eliciting narratives, but by experimenting with experiencing ‘living history’ for themselves.

In his analysis of the uses of history in film, Bartholeyns (2000:34) argues that authenticity

is not dependent on what does or does not conform to

the original. 'Authenticity' has no relationship with historical accuracy. It is neither its cause nor its consequence, and should instead be understood as the character of that which expresses a profound truth about man.

He puts forward the premise that the "represented past is experienced as a reality when it is no longer made up entirely of appearances" (2000:36). Although re-enactors themselves speak of the impossibility of achieving perfect verisimilitude, it is perhaps through this second type of authenticity - experienced in the interactions of their created social world - that it is successfully achieved.

Conclusion - Let's Pretend

The ludic is neither true nor false, nor does it suggest a specific emotional state - pleasure or pain. It simply points us to the power, the inevitability of our imaginative activities in which we have the opportunity to inscribe our fates, our desires, our stories in the air, and partly believe (to some degree) in their reality; ritual performances are testaments to our capacity to endlessly bring new possibilities into being without entirely relinquishing the old, prior understandings that have given rise to them; we make magic, believe in it and do not, at once, we make ourselves anew, yet remain familiar to ourselves, are capable of being carried away, changed, yet know fully and freely exactly what we are doing and why. (Myerhoff 1990:249)

For the first time in man's history, man is desperate to escape the present. Mistrust of the future also fuels today's nostalgia. We may not love the past as excessively as many did in the nineteenth century, but our misgivings about what may come are more grave. (Lowenthal 1985:11)

Turner theorized that "culture supplies [our brains] with a store of preserved social experiences which can be 'heated up' to supply the current hunger for meaning with reliable nutrients" (1990:13). If so, I would postulate that modern culture may be supplying us with a variety of 'fast food', and that re-enactors are attempting, in a sense, to 'cook from scratch'. As Crain writes, "in the new global construction of selfhood... identities have been reconfigured in light of a late twentieth-century sign economy, with

its accompanying search for unique representations that emphasize 'difference' and novelty" (1998:140). Re-enactors are 'past masters' at cornering this market.

Postmodernism not only creates the conditions under which the 'restoration of behavior' (Schechner 1982) or 'creation of identity' as a pastime is possible, but indeed in which it is necessary. Herzfeld argues that "people deploy the debris of the past for all kinds of present purposes" (1997:24). Like so many resources which once seemed infinite - clean water, the ocean's fisheries, forest timber - history is now heavily exploited for everything from commerce to entertainment to legal, territorial and political claim. History's value adds to its volatility - it is a seemingly inexhaustible resource for creating meaning, but 'the real truth', in other words, our version, is finite - and thus the conflict.

In Western societies, there is little acceptance that the 'Rashomon' effect¹⁰¹, in which simultaneous versions of reality seem to have equal weight and truthfulness, can be valid; while the Chinese *Tao te Ching* may advise that 'The Way that can be told is not the unchanging Way', the Western dialectic in contrast insists that 'the unchanging way must be told'. The democratization of access to 'history' and 'heritage' therefore leads to an inevitable struggle - to lay claim to, and maintain, 'the one true, perfect, and unchanging' historical account. This power of history is not a new thing; in ancient China, despotic rulers were threatened with the 'whip' of history - the risk that their unworthy deeds would be recorded after their death, and that they would be reviled rather than revered by future generations. This power, however, remained in the hands of the literate class, a class which was much smaller in medieval Europe. If the advent of mass printing in the vernacular was one of the cornerstones of the development of modern nationalism, it signaled equally the 'ordinary man's' access to the power of history, which has so often been harnessed to nationalist causes.

¹⁰¹ From the film of the same name by the Japanese director Akira Kurosawa, in which an event is described from the perspective of several individuals - each describing a completely different version of reality.

I have been asked what differentiates historical re-enactment as a process from other hobbies or pastimes enjoyed in large groups. Although many sports, for instance, share similar traits in their ritualized activities and symbolism – football, for example features group chanting of special songs, wearing of specialized clothing and body painting, a focus on a display of ritualized ‘combat’ and even specialized foods (“a pie and Bovril” - a hot beverage sold in football stadiums, similar to bouillon, served with small meat pies) I believe there are key differences.

The first of these is duration - the average re-enactment feast, for example, lasts as long as six hours. Re-enactment gatherings in private homes and historic sites, including workshops, feasts, and displays, often last twelve hours or more, and frequently entire weekends. During such events, participants may experience an exhilaration or emotional engagement which is all-consuming, focusing intensely on the performance and making spectators feel at one with the performers, in a process termed ‘shared flow’ (Turner 1987), exemplified by heightened arousal or ‘ergotropic behavior’ (Turner 1982). And such gatherings are repeated every weekend from early April through October, generally interspersed with smaller evening gatherings during the week to plan and work on upcoming events. Outside the public performance season when winter drives many indoors, these activities continue in private homes, parks, and school grounds. There is no rest for a re-enactor.

Levels of personal participation are on a different scale, as re-enactment is not only a year-round full-immersion pursuit, but by its very nature, do-it-yourself. Re-enactors create their own events, deciding not only where and when, but “when and who” - the historical period and persona to be performed. In addition, they do so almost entirely “from scratch” - imagine, to give some perspective, if football fans had to hire the pitch, train the players, build the stands, sew the “strips”, knit the scarves¹⁰², piece together and stitch the ball and weave the net, then bake the pies and distribute them.

¹⁰² For non-British readers, ‘pitch’ is the playing field, ‘strip’ the players’ uniform, and fans wear knitted scarves in their team’s colors.

Charismatic re-enactment group leaders - usually male - act as attractants, much like planetary bodies - they draw adherents to them, who themselves add to the mass, stability, and attractiveness of the group. When groups are large and stable enough, they can even accommodate factions with less danger of fragmentation and formation of splinter groups. However, although historical re-enactment, of battles in particular, retains a male-centered image, under the face-plates I discovered that the reality of re-enactment is quite different. Many of the warriors on the field, as I found, are women. But more than that, because of the intensive demands on time and money which I have described, participants generally re-enact with spouses, and children, if they have any, or not at all - 're-enactment widows' soon become 're-enactment divorcees'. More often, women now join men not only in the encampments, but on the battlefield, sometimes bringing their own husbands, children and even parents, with them. Re-enactment is therefore a multi-generational pursuit. These factors: duration, intensity, personal commitment and family participation, combine to draw re-enactors together into communities which define themselves as such in contrast to an external 'mundane' world. Elaborate performances of fictive kinship and political ties take on the attributes of ritual, so that on the performance continuum of sport to theatre to religious rite, re-enactors' gatherings often most closely resemble the last: religious ceremonies.

Truth and Faith

We need at one and the same time to know the past
as truth and as faith, as enlightened reality and as
amazed inspiration (Lowenthal 1998:xi).

Lowenthal (1998:1-2) has called worship of the past "one of the great secular religions", noting that the "creed of heritage answers needs for ritual devotion, especially where other formal faith has become perfunctory or mainly political. Like religious causes, heritage fosters exhilarating fealties". Re-enactors form a unique type of intentional community, which contains elements of both religion and science - attempting, perhaps, to extract the essences of both while avoiding the excesses, retaining for example the ritual of religion without the dogma. Re-enactment groups, if their performances are successful, partake of the ergotropic arousal (Turner 1987) of ritual action, and the

community-binding effects - perhaps best described as a 'rootedness' or 'certainty', typical of intentional religious communities. At the same time, they attempt to avoid the lack of openness to inquiry and questioning often seen as faults of established religion. They try instead to model themselves on the spirit of intellectual inquiry thought typical of scientific investigation, doing their own 'hands-on' and textual research, but eschewing the academic 'distancing' thought typical of positivist scientific research. Interestingly, Turner argued that the redressing function of social drama, which allowed self-assessment of a society's beliefs during times of crisis, "has moved out of the domains of law and religion and into those of the various arts... There is, therefore, in theatre, something of the investigative, judgmental, even punitive character of law-in-action, and something of the sacred, mythic, numinous, even 'supernatural' character of religious action" (1982:11-12).

They are ultimately, however, physical rather than spiritual communities - there is a deep trust of the body, of the body's ability to learn and do, and a distrust of what is known only at a distance, through the mind. The intensity of this 'full-body' experience is, in the end, what I believe attracts re-enactors to their pastime and keeps them, despite changes in personnel or leadership, as willing subjects of their own 'invisible kingdoms'.

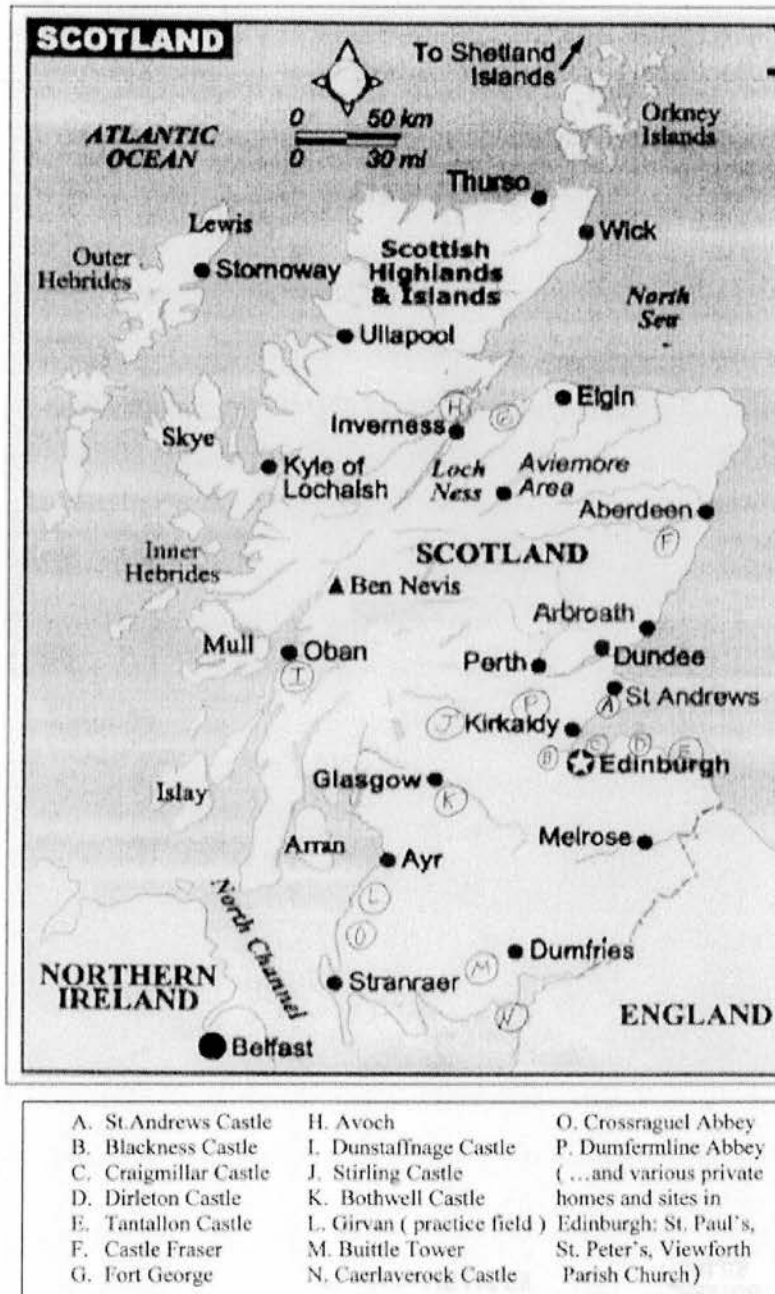
As Schiefflin has written:

I believe there is something fundamentally performative about human being-in-the-world... human intentionality, culture and social reality are fundamentally articulated in the world through performative activity. When human beings come into the presence of one another, they do so expressively... It is because human sociality continues in moment-by-moment existence only as human purposes and practices are performatively articulated in the world that performance is (or should be) of fundamental interest to anthropology (1998:195-6).

And Turner adds that:

For me, the anthropology of performance is an essential part of the anthropology of experience. In a sense, every type of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre and poetry, is explanation and explication of life itself. (1982:13).

Appendix 1:
Map of Scotland
with
Sites of Re-enactments



Appendix 2:
A Brief Timeline of Scottish History
Key re-enactment event periods
indicated in bold

c. 500 A.D. Irish 'Scoti' from Hibernia found kingdom of Dalriada in western Scotland.

794 Viking raids on Scottish coast.

839 Norse Vikings attack Pictish kingdom of northeast Scotland.

843 Kenneth MacAlpin attacks Picts & unites Pictland with Dalriada to form Alba.

890 Vikings found Earldom of Orkney.

1018 Battle of Carham - Lothian annexed; Malcolm II establishes the Tweed as southern boundary of Alba.

c. 1043 Duncan unites Kingdom of Strathclyde with Alba to form Scotland.

1098 Magnus of Norway takes Western Isles.

1175 Treaty of Falaise - Henry II of England claims overlordship of Scotland

1189 Quit-claim of Canterbury reverses Treaty of Falaise; Scotland independent

1237 Treaty of York formally recognizes Solway-Tweed line as boundary between Scotland & England.

1263 Battle of Largs - Haakon of Norway defeated by Alexander III; Orkney & Western Isles in Scottish control

1286 Alexander III dies while riding to see his wife, in labour in Fife. Struggle for the throne ensues. John Balliol, nicknamed 'Toom Tabard' (empty coat) by his subjects, is set upon the Scottish throne by Edward I of England, 'Hammer of the Scots'.

1296 John Balliol, not as complacent as hoped, forms the Auld Alliance with France, pledging mutual military aid. Edward I invades Scotland, slaughtering inhabitants of Berwick upon Tweed.

1296-1328, First Scottish Wars of Independence:

1297 Rising of William Wallace and Andrew de Moray

1305 Execution of Wallace in London

1306 Robert Bruce crowned at Scone

1314 Bruce defeats English forces at Bannockburn

1320 Declaration of Arbroath, addressed to the Pope, declares Scottish nationhood

1328 Treaty of Edinburgh confirms independence

1332 - 1357 Second Scottish Wars of Independence:

1332 Edward III of England supports Edward Balliol's attempt on the Scottish crown;
David II of Scotland defeated at Dupplin Moor

1333 Edward III attacks Scotland; Scots defeated at Halidon Hill; David II sent to
France

1341 David II returns to Scotland

1346 David captured at Battle of Neville's Cross

1357 Treaty of Berwick releases David II

late 1400 - early 1500s Border skirmishes by powerful local families: 'Reivers'

1560 Protestant rebellion

1578 Second Book of Discipline issued

1592 Presbyterian government of the Scottish kirk declared

Covenanting Period, or English Civil War

1637 New Book of Prayer introduced to Scotland, causing rebellion

1638 National Covenant launched

1643 Scots enter Civil War alongside English parliament after declaring Solemn League
and Covenant

1646 Charles I surrenders to the Scots

1649 Charles executed by English

1651 English and Scottish governments united under Cromwell; English troops occupy
Scotland after Charles II's crowning at Scone

1666 Rebellion of Covenanters

1679 Covenanters defeated

1688 James VII driven from England

Jacobite Period

1701 James VII dies; Stewart supporters termed 'Jacobites'; 'James VIII' in exile

1707 Union of the Crowns

1708 Jacobite rebellion

1715 Jacobite rebellion

1719 Jacobite rebellion

1745-6 Last Jacobite rebellion ends in defeat at Culloden

Appendix 3:
Fictive Kinship - The Household of Gunnar
Three Generations of Re-enactors

The Household of Sir Gunnar Tormundsson

Tormund Gunnarsson (Sir Gunnar's father)		(Sir Gunnar's Mother)
Sir Hrolf Arnarsson ----- Fion Tormundsdottir (formerly squire (Sir Gunnar's sister, to Sir Gunnar, betrothed to Sir Hrolf)	Sir Gunnar Tormundsson----- Lady Ragnhild Askillsdottir (Sir Gunnar's wife, mother of Sir Arni, Vigdis & Ashild)	
Sir Rhodri of Flint (formerly squire to squire to Sir Gunnar)	Sir Arni Grimsson (male persona of Ragnhild - formerly squire to Sir Andrew, stepson of Sir Gunnar)	Vigdis Gunnarsdottir (daughter of Sir Gunnar and Lady Ragnhild)
Ictuan ap Arthur ap Ardur (squire to Sir Hrolf)	Brother Malcolm Skallagrim (household priest)	Ashild Gunnarsdottir (daughter of Sir Gunnar and Lady Ragnhild)
Bard Erikson (male persona of Aldis Jorundsdottir, and squire to Sir Arni)		Henry of Bowden Freydis Haraldsdottir (household fool) (foster daughter to Lady Ragnhild)
Gwyn ap Hywel (squire to Sir Hrolf)	Devorgilla (housekeeper)	Aldis Jorundsdottir (foster daughter to Lady Ragnhild)
Ascleif Olafsdottir (squire to Sir Arni)		Quivox (amber merchant, husband of Devorgilla)
		Gwenneth (foster daughter to Lady Ragnhild)

Appendix 4:
A Viking Wedding -
an embroidered story



Figure 83 - Ragnhild is on the left, and Gunnar on the right, preparing before witnesses to hand over the keys to his properties and goods

Appendix 5:
Fictive Biography -
the life of 'Hrolf Arnorrson' in his own words

“He was born in Iceland but exiled to Norway for excessive cheerfulness. There he took up with a band of young men to go a-Viking [*note: this originally meant simply 'travelling'*]. They sailed south for the coast of Sutherland [*the northernmost tip of Scotland, so-named by the Vikings who saw it as the 'Southern land'*], and when they got there they told Hrolf to go scouting, and they would wait for him. He went off and observed and made mental notes, because he couldn't write. But when he returned, they were gone. So he carved a message in some drift wood - well, he could write runes, they're just straight scratches. He knows how to write his name because his mom sewed it into the back of his hat before he went away: 'Hrolf'. But they never came back, so he took up with a man named Gunnar, a local merchant and free-lance raider, began to court his sister, and now has been offered her hand in marriage.”

Rhodri: “Is that the end of the story?”

Hrolf: “That's the end of most stories - you get married, have children, and die”.

Gunnar: “That's what 'Viking' was all about anyway - trying to get your feet under some table.”

Appendix 6:

Re-enactment Publications - Advertisements for Events

HISTORIC SCOTLAND

TANTALLON CASTLE
SATURDAY JUNE 12 &
SUNDAY JUNE 13

**MEDIEVAL
JOUSTING
SPECTACULAR**



12.00 - 12.45 Gaddgsdlat & The Edinburgh Band of Prey Centre
Living history, combat re-enactment and jousting meet
together in a special collaboration to create and exciting
show highlighting skills with longbow, spear and sword
alongside the spectacular flying of magnificent birds of prey.

12.45 - 1.30 Carrick 800 - *From the Picts of Neolithic*
Witness the life of a Viking ruler and share in the warriors
in their single combat with sword, axe and spear.

1.30 - 2.15 JOUSTING SHOW

2.15 - 3.00 Gaddgsdlat & The Edinburgh Band of Prey Centre

3.00 - 3.45 JOUSTING SHOW

3.45 - 4.00 Carrick 800 - second show

**A Saxon Battle
at
Stafford Castle**

**Sept.
4th-5th**
(Noon till 4.30pm both days)



Featuring:
* **Combat**
* **The Circle of Treachery**
* **Living History**

Admissions:
Child/Conc. £2.00
Adult £3.00
Family 2+2 £7.00

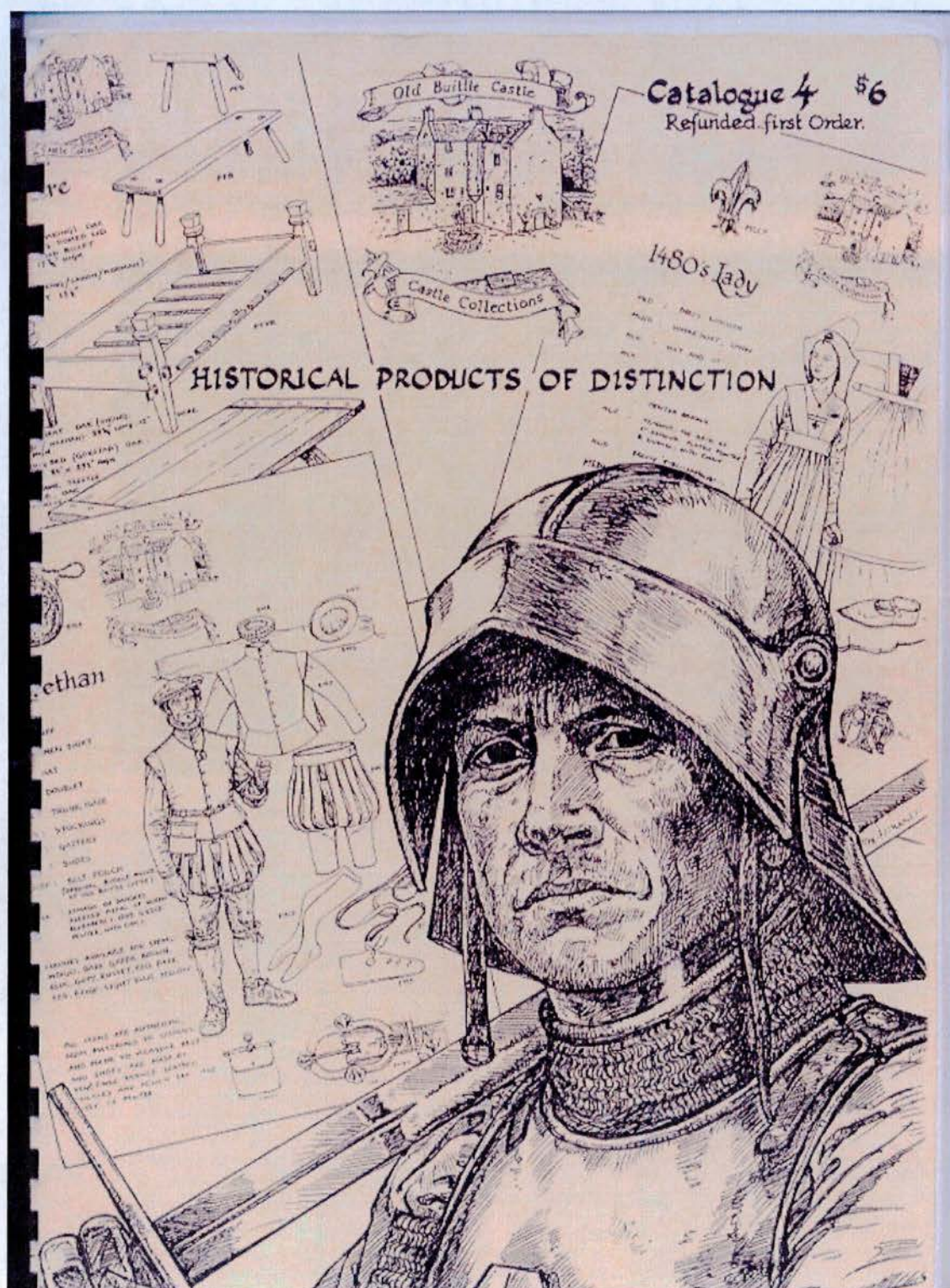
Re-enactment Publications – Magazines

ECHOES FROM THE PAST

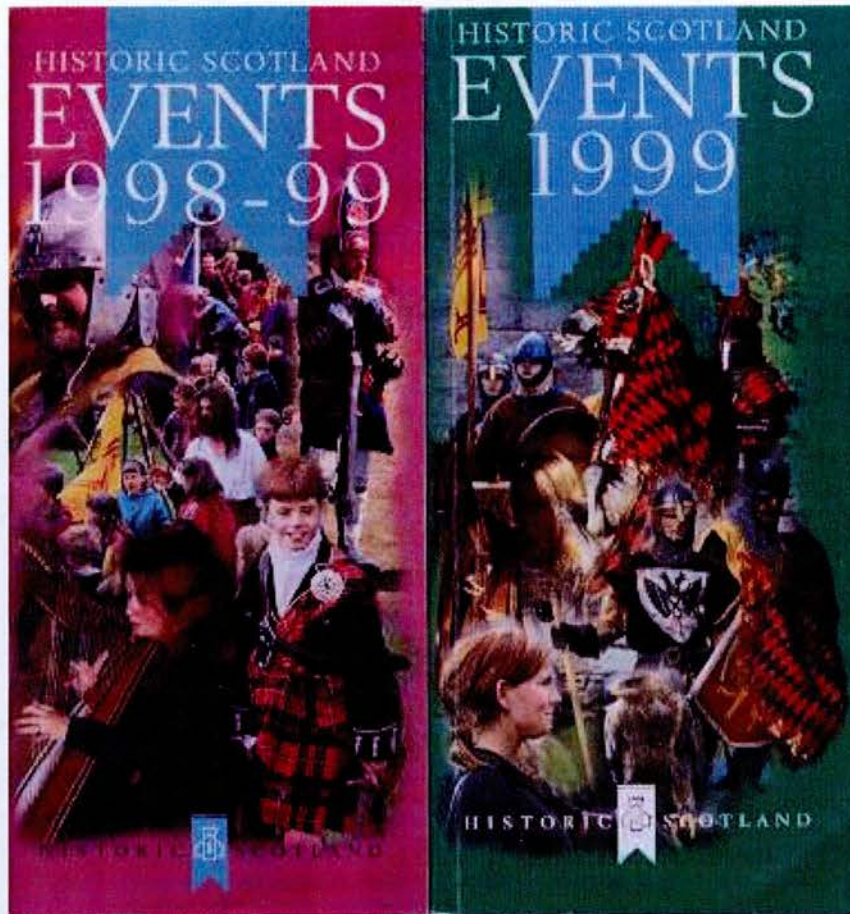


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